

Northeastern Aegean Islands

Τα Νησιά του Βορειοανατολικού Αιγαίου



Diverse, mysterious and achingly beautiful, the islands of the northeastern Aegean offer endless rewards for those intrepid enough to seek them out. Hidden sandy coves, lush mountain waterfalls and ancient sites of divine power are only a few of the attractions in this far-flung archipelago – also known for its wild celebration of saints' feasts, delicious cuisine and good-natured sybaritism.

While exasperating ferry schedules make island-hopping here a challenge, the individual character of each island more than makes up for the effort. Icaria, with its bizarre rock formations and laid-back, leftist lifestyle is unique, as is Lesvos, with its 11 million olive trees and idyllic mountain villages. Semitropical Samos and pine-scented Thasos boast great beaches, while the almost unvisited Inousses, Fourni and Psara offer total serenity.

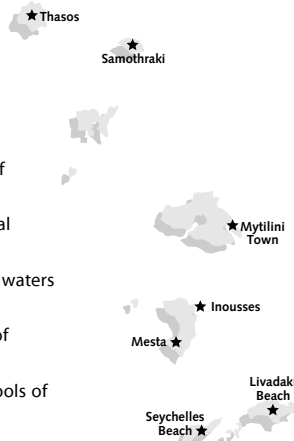
These lesser-visited islands also have an importance entirely disproportionate to their size. Over one-third of Greece's ship-owning dynasties hail from Chios and nearby Inousses; and 70% of the national firewater, ouzo, comes from Lesvos – also famous for its olive oil, rare fossils and the only petrified forest outside the USA. One of Europe's most important ancient spiritual sites lies on distant Samothraki, and only in the villages of southern Chios is the renowned gum-producing mastic tree cultivated. And Little Thasos contains the world's second-whitest marble.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Dining** Checking out Mytilini Town's gourmet *ouzeries* on Lesvos (p621)
- **Chill-out Spot** Relaxing on sultry Livadaki Beach on Samos (p602)
- **Adrenaline Rush** Mountain biking the mountains of Thasos (p644)
- **Magic Moment** Unwinding in the tranquil mediaeval town of Mesta on Chios (p614)
- **Getting Away From it All** Lounging in crystal-clear waters at Icaria's Seychelles Beach (p595)
- **Historical Experience** Visiting the ancestral home of Greece's great shipping barons in Inousses (p616)
- **Green Haven** Hiking the lush waterfalls and rock pools of Samothraki (p639)

■ POPULATION: 204,161

■ AREA: 3842 SQ KM



GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Samos, Chios, Lesvos, Limnos and Icaria have flights to Athens and Thessaloniki. Interisland flights go between Lesvos, Limnos, Samos and Chios. Thasos and Samothraki don't have airports.

Ferry

Grand wars of one-upmanship between Greece's shipping barons continue to wreak havoc with ferry schedules in the eastern Aegean islands. If you're planning to hit them all, budget extra time and patience, and don't do it in low season, when voyages are reduced. In any season mutually unconnected Samothraki and Thasos are particularly difficult to reach, and require a link from the mainland port of Kavala or else transit via Limnos.

The table (p591) outlines scheduled high-season domestic ferries to the islands from mainland ports. These islands are also on various popular interisland routes; the Dodecanese and Mykonos are two popular destinations. Interisland links are covered in the sections on individual islands.

There are also international connections with the Turkish Aegean coast. In summer daily boats go between Samos and Kuşadası (for Ephesus), and between Chios and Çeşme. Ferries from Lesvos to Ayvalık run four times weekly.

Hydrofoil

Regular hydrofoils in summer go between Kavala and Thasos' two port towns, and between Alexandroupoli and Samothraki. Hydrofoils also operate from Samos west to Icaria and Fourni, south towards the Dodecanese, and north towards Chios and Lesvos.

IKARIA & THE FOURNI ISLANDS

IKARIA & ΟΙ ΦΟΥΡΝΟΙ

area 255 sq km

It will be a long time before Icaria is paved over and packaged, and the locals seem to like it that way. Yet with therapeutic hot springs as radioactive as the communist sympathisers

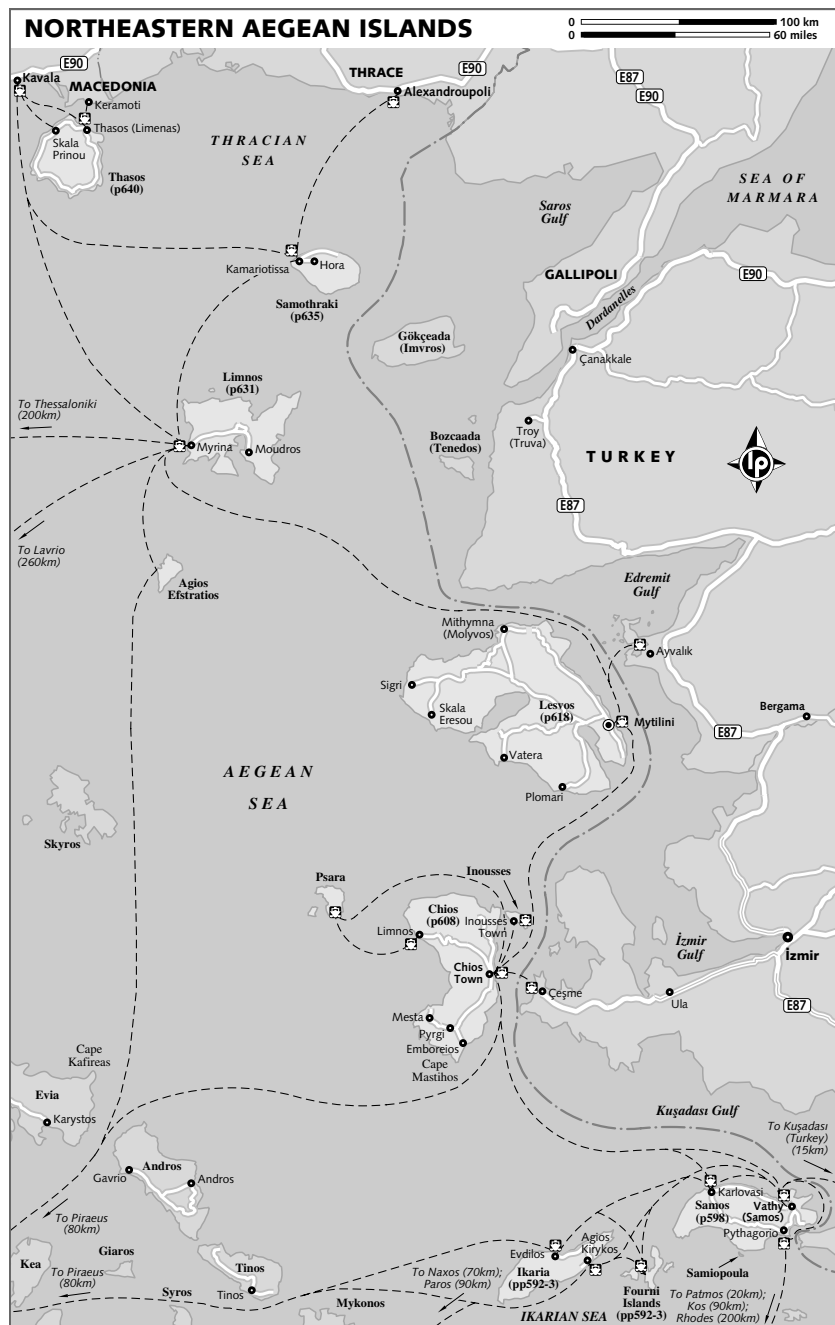
once exiled here, this laid-back island of stark ravines, windswept desert trees and shimmering waters lapping on white-pebbled beaches is starting to be discovered. Not to worry: most of the roads are still made of dirt, the bus service is almost nonexistent and no one wakes before noon.

Icaria (pronounced ih-kah-ree-ah) is shrouded in myth. It was named after Icarus, the son of Daedalus, the mythical architect of the Cretan labyrinth of King Minos. When the two tried to escape from Minos' prison on wings of wax, Icarus ignored his father's warning, flew too close to the sun and crashed down into the sea, creating Icaria – a rocky reminder of the dangers of overweening ambition, which the dozing locals appear to have taken to heart.

More happily, the island was also celebrated by the ancients as the birthplace of Dionysos, the god of wine, fruitfulness and foliage; the poetry of Homer attests that the Ikarians were the first wine-makers. Unfortunately, a phylloxera outbreak in the mid-1960s decimated Icaria's wine industry, but visitors can still sample the island's signature cloudy red locally.

History records little about Icaria between ancient times, when it was an ally of Athens, and the Byzantine period, when it was a safe haven for pirates and a place of exile. The latter function was reprised during the three-year Greek Civil War that raged following WWII, when the right-wing government exiled some 15,000 suspected communists to Icaria. Today the comrades from Greece's Communist Party are still in power; travellers seeking refuge from a typical island's package tourism can thank them and their ambivalence to enterprise for Icaria's timeless air.

Icaria is full of pristine beaches, healing hot springs and bohemian attitude, and much more, too. *Panigyria* (festivals; the ritual annual celebrations of saints' days) are veritable events involving copious amounts of food, drink, music and dance that would do Dionysos proud. In spring Icaria's meadows are ablaze with wildflowers, their range of colour complemented by an endlessly varied interplay of light and shadow on the island's boulder-strewn scrub-land interior – making it a perfect place for photographers and painters. Sculptors, too, are impressed by Icaria's unusual abundance of different types of stone.

**FERRY CONNECTIONS TO THE NORTHEASTERN AEGEAN ISLANDS**

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Freq
Alexandroupoli	Chios	15¼hr	€27.20	weekly
	Lesvos (Mytilini)	11¼hr	€20.90	weekly
	Limnos	5hr	€17.90	2 weekly
	Samos	18¾hr	€33.50	weekly
Kavala	Samothraki	2hr	€11	daily
	Chios	hr	€24.50	weekly
	Lesvos (Mytilini)	10hr	€24.70	2 weekly
	Limnos	5hr	€15.30	4 weekly
Keramoti	Thasos (Skala Prinou)	1¼hr	€3.80	hourly
	Chios	40min	€2	hourly
Piraeus	Chios	8hr	€22.50	daily
	Ikaria	9hr	€25	daily
	Lesvos (Mytilini)	12hr	€27.90	daily
	Limnos	13hr	€25.50	3 weekly
	Samos	13hr	€26	2 daily
	Limnos	13hr	€21.20	4 weekly
Thessaloniki	Chios	18hr	€34.20	weekly
	Lesvos	13hr	€30.20	2 weekly
	Limnos	7hr	€22.10	2 weekly

Getting There & Away**AIR**

In summer there are six flights weekly from Athens (€50, 50 minutes), most departing after 1pm. There are also twice-weekly flights to Heraklion in Crete, leaving at 8am.

Olympic Airlines (☎ 22750 22214; www.olympicairlines.com) is in Agios Kirykos; **Nas Travel** (☎ 22750 31947) in Evdilos also sells tickets. There's no airport bus; taxis from Agios Kirykos cost around €10.

CAÏQUE

A caique leaves Agios Kirykos at 1pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for the nearby Fourni archipelago (€4). The caique calls at Fourni town and usually at Hrysomilia or Thymena; all have domatia (a cheap accommodation option) and tavernas. Day-trip excursion boats to Fourni also go from Agios Kirykos and Evdilos (€20).

FERRY

Most of Ikaria's ferries are on the Piraeus-Samos route. Two weekly ferries go to Piraeus (€32, nine hours) and three to Samos (€10, three hours). Five boats weekly serve Fourni (€8, two hours). Additionally, in summer **Kallisti Ferries** (☎ 801 117 7700; www.kallistiferries.gr) operates the high-speed *Corsica Express* four times weekly between Vathy (Samos), Karlovasi (Samos), Agios Kirykos/Evdilos (Ikaria)

and Piraeus (4¼ hours), with a once-weekly diversion to Fourni on Saturday.

The Cyclades are served by twice-weekly ferries to Paros (€14.30) and Naxos (€12.50), as well as five weekly ferries to Mykonos (€13.10, 2½ hours) and Syros (€14.50, 3½ hours).

Get tickets at **Icariada Holidays** (☎ 22750 22277; icariada@hol.gr) or **G&A Ferries** (☎ 22750 22426) in Agios Kirykos, or from **Nas Travel** (☎ 22750 71396; fax 22750 71397) in Evdilos and Armenistis.

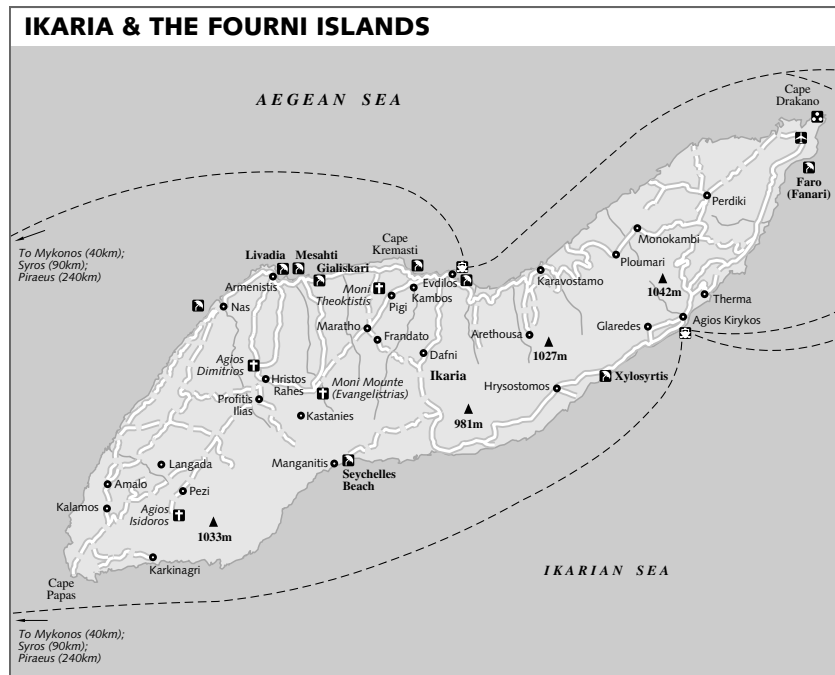
HYDROFOIL

Ikaria's hydrofoil service is usually in July and August only. Common destinations are Piraeus, Samos, and some Dodecanessian and Cycladic islands. Check with **Dolihli Tours Travel Agency** (☎ 22750 23230; fax 22750 22346) in Agios Kirykos or **Nas Travel** (☎ 22750 71396; fax 22750 71397) in Evdilos and Armenistis.

**Getting Around
BUS & TAXI**

Ikaria's bus situation is not auspicious. Theoretically, in summer a bus leaves Evdilos for Agios Kirykos daily at 8am, returning at noon. However, since the bus system exists to transport school children, not tourists, don't depend on it.

The whims of individual drivers can determine the schedules from Agios Kirykos to Hristos Rahes (near Moni Evangelistrias),



Xylosyrtis and Hrysostomos. If you don't rent a car, share a taxi; from Agios Kirykos to Evidilos costs around €35.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Given Ikaria's public transport limitations, renting a car or scooter is a wise idea if you want to see anything beyond the main towns. **Dolihi Tours Travel Agency** (☎ 22750 23230; fax 22750 22346) in Agios Kirykos, **Nas Travel** (☎ 22750 71396; fax 22750 71397) in Evidilos and Armenistis, and **Aventura Car & Bike Rental** (☎ 22750 31140; aventura@otenet.gr) in Evidilos and Armenistis can outfit you.

WATER TAXI

Water taxis are helpful for nondrivers, or anyone up for a good boat ride. In summer daily water taxis go from Agios Kirykos to Therna and to the sandy beach at Faro (also known as Fanari) on Ikaria's northern tip (€12 return). Heading the other way, there's also a caïque every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in summer from Agios Kirykos to the fishing village of Karkinagri on the southwestern coast, stopping at Maganitis and its celebrated

Seychelles Beach on the way. This boat is the only realistic way for nondrivers to get to this remote corner of Ikaria.

AGIOS KIRYKOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΚΟΣ pop 1879

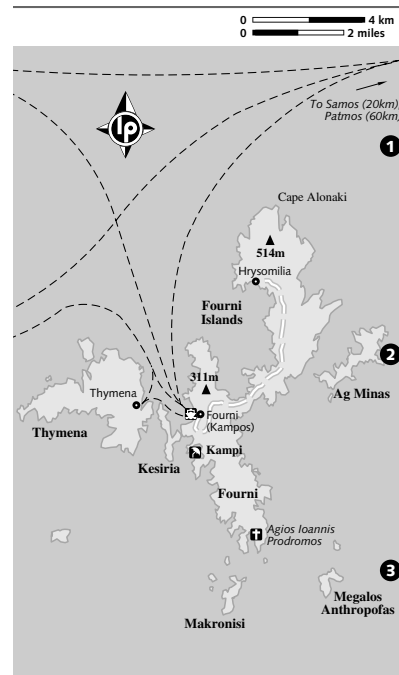
Honorary capital of Ikaria, Agios Kirykos is a dependable Greek port with clustered old streets, tasty restaurants, unique nearby attractions and the services that will get you deeper into the island. Radioactive springs and a little nightlife are other pluses, as is Xylosyrtis Beach (4km southwest), the best of several local pebble beaches.

Orientation

The ferry quay is 150m south of the town centre; to reach the central *plateia* (square), turn right onto the main road. Leaving the quay, turn left on the central *plateia*; the bus stop is just west. Excursion boats and hydrofoils dock near Dolihi Tours Travel Agency.

Information

Alpha Bank, next to Dolihi Tours Travel Agency, and the National Bank of Greece,



on the *plateia*, have ATMs. The police station is above Dolihi Tours Travel Agency, and the post office is left of the *plateia*.

Dolihi Tours Travel Agency (☎ 22750 23230; fax 22750 22346) Helpful agency that can arrange accommodation; located below the police station.

Icariada Holidays (☎ 22750 23322; icariada@hol.gr) Helpful staff sell ferry and plane tickets, and can arrange accommodation in Fourni. On the waterfront.

Police (☎ 22750 22222)

Port police (☎ 22750 22207)

Tourist police (☎ 22750 22222)

Sights & Activities

Opposite the police station are the **radioactive springs** (admission €5; ☎ 7am-2.30pm & 5-9pm Jun-Oct). Their salutary effects include curing arthritis and infertility.

Agios Kirykos' small **archaeological museum** (☎ 22750 31300; admission free; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue & Wed, Fri-Sun Jul & Aug) boasts local finds, highlighting the large, well-preserved stele (500 BC) depicting a seated mother and family. The signposted museum is near the hospital.

Sleeping

Hotel Akti (☎ 22750 23905; fax 22750 22694; s/d €35/50; ♿) A good budget choice, the Akti has small but attractive rooms with fridge, TV and mosquito netting, with a nice location on the rocks overlooking the sea and port, and friendly, English-speaking owners. Follow the steps to the right of Alpha Bank.

Hotel Kastro (☎ 22750 23480; www.island-ikaria.com/hotels/kastro.asp; d €50; ♿) This well-appointed hotel has handsome rooms with balconies and all mod cons. The bar is complemented by an appealing rooftop pool. At the top of the stairs leading from Dolihi Tours Travel Agency, go left 20m to the hotel.

Eating & Drinking

Taverna Klimataria (☎ 22750 22686; mains €6-9; ♿) year-round) This back-street taverna, strong on grilled meats, has a lovely summer courtyard.

Restaurant Dedalos (☎ 22750 22473; mains €7-10) This busy eatery on the central *plateia* is known for its tasty fresh fish.

AROUND AGIOS KIRYKOS

Some 2km northeast of town are the popular **hot springs of Therna** (☎ 69771 47014; admission €5; ☎ 7am-2.30pm & 5-9pm Jun-Oct), believed to cure many ailments. Along with the airport, Ikaria's eastern tip boasts the 2km-long **Faro Beach**, 10km north along the coast road, and the 3rd-century BC **fortress of Drakanos** (currently being excavated), which sponsored religious rites dedicated to Eilythia, a minor pregnancy-promoting deity.

While a few tavernas hug the beach, it remains blissfully quiet compared to the major northwest-coast beaches. Just up from it, on the main access road, the friendly Greek-Australian Evon Plakidis at **Rooms Evon** (☎ 22750 32580; www.evonsrooms.com; ste €50-110) rents clean, high-quality suites, some with spiral stairs, and all with kitchenettes. The studios can hold up to six people. There's also internet access for guests.

EVDILOS ΕΥΔΗΛΟΣ

pop 461

Evidilos, the island's second port, is 41km northwest of Agios Kirykos. The road connecting them is Ikaria's main road. If you don't have a car, a taxi costs around €35 for the memorable trip, which takes in high mountain ridges, striking sea views and slate-roof villages. Evidilos itself is sleepy, though

RELIGIOUS REVELRY ON THE ISLAND OF WINE

Pagan god Dionysos may no longer reign over the vineyards of Ikaria, but his legacy lives on in Christianised form in the summertime *panigyria* (festivals; all-night celebrations held on saints' days across the island). There's no better way to dive headfirst into Greek island culture than drinking, dancing and feasting in honour of a village's patron saint. Bring your wallet, however: *panigyria* are important fundraisers for the local community. Use this fact to explain any overindulgences as well-intended philanthropy.

Western Ikaria *panigyria* take place on the following dates:

- **Kambos** 5 May
- **Agios Isidoros** 14 May
- **Armenistis** 40 days after Orthodox Easter
- **Pezi** 14 May
- **Agios Kirykos & Ikarian Independence Day** 17 July
- **Hristos Rahes & Dafne** 6 August
- **Langada** 15 August
- **Evdilos** 14-17 August
- **Agios Sofia** 17 September

its narrow streets are chronically congested with cars, and fishing is strong. It also has a few stately old houses and winding streets (follow Kalliopis Katsouli, the cobbled street leading uphill from the waterfront square). Walk 100m uphill from the *plateia*, then take the path down past the last house on the left to reach the local beach.

Information

The waterfront's eastern and western ends have ATMs. The latter also hosts the ticket agencies for **NEL Lines** (☎ 22750 31572) and **Helias Ferries** (☎ 22750 31990). **Aventura** (☎ 22750 31140), in a side street off the central waterfront, rents cars and bikes, sells tickets and offers information.

Sleeping

Hotel Atheras (☎ 22750 31434; www.atheras-kerame.gr; s/d €52/62; 🍷 🍷 🍷) There's an almost Cycladic feel to the Atheras, marked by bright white décor contrasting with the blue Aegean beyond. This friendly and modern hotel also has a pool bar. Find it in the backstreets, about 200m from the port.

Kerame Studios (☎ 22750 31434; www.atheras-kerame.gr; studio/apt from €70; 🍷 🍷 🍷) These diverse studios, apartments and rooms 1km before Evdilos have close beach access. Prices are as variable as the quarters, which include simple but well-maintained studios and apartments

for four people, with separate kitchen. Rooms have spacious decks with good views; the on-site restaurant is built into a windmill.

Hotel Evdoxia (☎ 22750 31502; www.evdoxia.gr; d €70; 🍷 🍷) Although it's a bit of a climb, this B-class hotel has attractive modern rooms and many facilities, like a minimarket, laundry service, currency exchange and traditional restaurant. If you reserve in advance for several days, pick-up can be arranged free from the ferry.

Eating

Tsakonitis (☎ 22750 31684; Plateia Evdilou; mezedhes €3.50-5) This *ouzerie* (place that serves ouzo and light snacks) down on the water is a local favourite known for its home-made Greek yogurt.

To Steki (☎ 22750 31723; Plateia Evdilou; mains €5-7) This harbour-side dining 'hang-out' (as its name implies in Greek) is a dependable year-round option for taverna fare, such as cheese pies and *soufiko* (an Ikarian speciality, like a Greek ratatouille).

WEST OF EVDILOS

Kambos Κάμπος pop 94

Little Kambos, 3km west of Evdilos, was once mighty Oinoe (derived from the Greek word for wine), Ikaria's capital. Traces of this ancient glory don't remain, though the village does have ruins of a Byzantine palace, Ikaria's

oldest church and a small museum. Kambos' other main attractions are its sand-and-pebble beach and scenic hill-walking opportunities.

INFORMATION

If he's not cooking for the guests at his little hotel, charismatic local Vasilis Kambouris can be found at his village shop (it's on the right as you arrive from Evdilos), which also hosts Kambos' post box and a telephone. Vasilis, who has been assisting travellers for over 30 years, can help with anything you need in Kambos, and in Ikaria in general.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

On the right-hand side when entering Kambos from Evdilos stand the modest ruins of a **Byzantine palace**. Kambos' centre has a small **museum** (☎ 22750 31300; admission free), with Neolithic tools, geometric vases, classical sculpture fragments, figurines and ivory trinkets. If it's not open, ask Vasilis Kambouris. Adjacent stands Ikaria's oldest surviving church, the 12th-century Byzantine **Agia Irini**. As is common in Greece, it was built on the site of an earlier church, in this case a 4th-century basilica: some columns come from this original. Alas, Agia Irini's frescoes remain covered with whitewash because of no funds to pay for its removal.

SLEEPING & EATING

Our pick Rooms Dionysos (☎ 22750 31300; dionisos@hol.gr; d €35) The undisputed heavyweight champ of Ikarian tourism, ebullient Vasilis Kambouris, runs this wonderful *penzion* with his Australian wife Dimitra and brother Yiannis. The fact that almost 50% of his guests are return visitors says it all about this welcoming little hotel with simple but well-maintained rooms and a lovely shaded patio overlooking

nearby Kambos Beach. Big breakfasts are the jovial Vasilis' hallmark; more intangibly, there is the sense of community and openness he fosters by bringing together people from all countries (a few unexpected marriages have even come from walking in and out of Rooms Dionysos!), who cherish the relaxed atmosphere and unique, friendly service. To find it, ask at Vasilis' village shop or look out for the blue-painted trees.

Balcony (☎ 22750 31604; d/tr €35/50) This family-friendly collection of six apartments requires a hike to get to, but rewards visitors with fantastic views. Classic wrought-iron furniture distinguishes the studios, which have a kitchen and a loft-sleeping area with twin mattresses. French-style doors lead to a private sitting area with coastal views.

Pashalia (☎ 22750 31346; mains €6-8) A family-run *ouzerie* with tradition, the Pashalia is a great place to meet engaging local characters and try delectable home-made *mezedhes* (appetisers), such as wild mushrooms, fresh mountain asparagus and goats cheese.

Kambos to the Southwest Coast

From Kambos, two roads head west: the main road, which hugs the northern coast until the resort of Armenistis, and then becomes a secondary road for the duration of the trip down the northwestern coast; and another secondary road, mostly dirt but doable with a good car, which ribbons slightly southwest through the stunning moonscapes of central Ikaria to the remote coastal village of Karkinagri. The latter is ideal for those who want to get off the beaten track, while the former is the obvious choice for beach lovers.

The southwest coast road through central Ikaria brings you to **Moni Theoktistis** and the tiny **Chapel of Theoskepasti** (see boxed text,

MOUNTAIN WALKS & MONKS SKULLS

With its solitude and wild nature, Ikaria is perfect for mountain walks. One that is invigorating, but not too hard on the bones, is the one-day circular walk along dirt roads from **Kambos** south through the village of **Dafni**, the remains of the 10th-century Byzantine **Castle of Koskinas**, and the villages of **Frاندato** and **Maratho**.

When you reach the village of **Pigi**, keep an eye out for the Frандato sign; continue past it to reach the unusual little Byzantine **Chapel of Theoskepasti**, tucked into overhanging granite. You have to clamber upwards to get to it, and duck to get inside. Provided the old monks' skulls on display don't creep you out, the chapel makes for a wonderfully peaceful visit and is near **Moni Theoktistis**, some of whose frescoes date from 1686. The kindly Maria runs the nearby *kafeneio* (coffee house), where you can stop in for a coffee or juice and chat with the locals.

p595), just northwest of the village of Pigi. From Pigi, continue south to Maratho, then follow the road west to reach **Moni Mounte**, also known as Moni Evangelistrias. Some 500m after it, on a duck pond with giant goldfish and croaking frogs, is the very unusual **I Kantina tou Papa** (☎ 22750 41133; mezedhes €3-5; ☎ 11am-9pm), a retro-fitted campervan, founded and operated by a priest, that serves mezedhes like *bourekekaki* (cheese pies), fried zucchini flowers, and refreshing sweets made of cherry and lemon. You're seated at slate tables in the shade to eat and drink; the pond and its colourful inhabitants are a favourite with kids.

After the Kantina, the road forks either northwest or southwest: follow the signs and either will take you to **Hristos Rahes**, an eclectic village in the hills that is a good base for local hiking and was once known for its late-night shopping. Along with various traditional products, you can buy a useful walking map called *The Round of Rahes on Foot* (€3) at most tourist shops and markets.

After Hristos Rahes, follow the road south through rustic **Profitis Ilias**. Keep heading south when the road forks; after 1km take the left towards **Pezi**. The landscape now becomes even more rugged and extreme, with wind-whipped thick green trees clinging to bleak boulders, and rows of old agriculturalists' stone walls snaking across the terrain. It is a bouncy, dusty ride, but worth it for the views of the hard interior and, after you turn left at Kalamos, of the sea far below. The road finally terminates in the tiny and isolated fishing village of **Karkinagri**, which has a few tavernas, rooms and a nearby beach.

In summer Karkinagri also has a thrice-weekly boat service to Agios Kirykos. This highly recommended voyage brings you along Ikaria's rugged and partially inaccessible southern coast. The boat calls in at the village of **Manganitis**; nearby is a gorgeous, secluded stretch of white pebbles and crystal-clear waters – the appropriately named **Seychelles Beach** tucked within a protected cove and flanked by a cave.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Raches (☎ 22750 91222; Hristos Rahes; s/d €25/35) Upstairs from Taverna Katoï these simple but clean and inexpensive domatia have balconies with views, a communal area and friendly owners – no wonder it's fully booked in high season.

Kaza Papas (☎ 22750 91222; www.karkinagri.gr; Karkinagri; d/apt €40/50; ☎) These simple but new air-conditioned domatia and apartments in Karkinagri have great views of the sea. Facing the water, you can turn right behind the tavernas and walk 100m along the waterfront to reach them, though it's better to call in advance.

Taverna Katoï (☎ 22750 41269; Hristos Rahes; mains €6-8) Hopefully the talk of this Hristos Rahes taverna not reopening will be proven false, as it's a wonderful, eclectic place filled with unusual bric-a-brac and with a relaxing garden. It also serves great Ikarian fare and local wine.

O Karakas (☎ 22750 91214; Karkinagri; mains €5-9) On a bamboo-roofed patio by the sea, this excellent family-run taverna does good fresh fish and salads. Especially tasty and unique is the Ikarian vegetable stew speciality, *soufiko*.

Armenistis to Nas Αρμενιστής προς Να Armenistis, 15km west of Evdilos, is Ikaria's humble version of a resort. It boasts two long, sandy beaches separated by a narrow headland, a fishing harbour and a web of hilly streets to explore, but nothing particularly traditional. Moderate nightlife livens up the town in summer, but it's still light years away from the typical Greek island resort. **Dolifi Tours** (☎ 22750 71480; fax 22750 71340), by the sea, organises walking tours and jeep safaris. **Aventura** (☎ 22750 71117), by the patisserie before the bridge, rents cars and sells tickets.

Just 500m east of Armenistis is **Livadia Beach**, which will please surfers with its strong waves in summer – strong enough indeed to warrant a lifeguard service. Beyond Livadia are two other popular beaches, **Mesahti** and **Gialiskari**.

From Armenistis heading west, a road continues 3.5km to the pebbled beach of **Nas**, located far below the road and the handful of tavernas gathered nearby. The beach, which has an impressive location at the mouth of a forested river and behind the remnants of an ancient **Temple of Artemis**, is nudist friendly.

Nas itself has become a bit trendy, in a subdued way, and preserving this state of affairs has led the Greek police to vigorously break up impromptu beach hovels belonging to the hapless hippies the place attracts. They usually retreat into the river forest to camp, and are in any case benevolent, more so than the pushy Athenian anarchists who ruin the mood by slaughtering the occasional

goat, perhaps as the ancient worshippers at the nearby Temple of Artemis once did.

SLEEPING

Rooms Fotinos (☎ 22750 71235; www.island-ikaria.com/hotels/PensionFotinos.asp; d €40; ☎ May-Oct; ☎) This family-run *pension* in Armenistis is 150m above the curving beach on which it looks down from the west. It has only seven rooms, all clean and modern, with a lovely, relaxing garden, and the owners are friendly and helpful.

Gallini (☎ 22750 71293; www.galinipension.gr; d €50; ☎ May-Oct) A good choice with fine views of the coast, these 12 domatia hover above Armenistis. They are small but beautifully furnished, with walls of inset stone and big windows. Studios are larger, with slanting, loft-style ceilings and kitchenettes.

Atsachas Rooms (☎ /fax 22750 71226; www.atsachas.gr; d €50) Right on Livadia Beach, the Atsachas has clean, well-furnished rooms, some with sophisticated kitchens. Most have breezy, sea-view balconies. The café spills down to the lovely garden: the restaurant has also won plaudits.

Villa Dimitri (☎ /fax 22750 71310; www.villa-dimitri.de; 2-person studios & apt with private patio €50-65; ☎ Mar-Oct; ☎) This assortment of separate, secluded apartments set on a cliff amid colourful flowers and plants has a Cycladic feel. It's 800m west of Armenistis and not somewhere you just show up: advance bookings, for a minimum of one week, are essential.

Panorama (☎ 22750 71177; studios €80) This collection of five self-catering studios is located up a steep driveway right before the village. Rooms fit up to four people and feature handsome combinations of wood and marble, all with new fixtures and good sea views.

EATING

Pshalia Taverna (☎ 22750 71302; Armenistis; mains from €5; ☎ Jun-Nov) Meat dishes like *katsikaki* (kid goat) or veal in a clay pot are the speciality here, the first taverna along the Armenistis harbour road.

Kelari (☎ 22750 71227; Gialiskari; mains €6-13) Taking the fish straight off the boat, Kelari serves the best seafood available at this laid-back beach east of Armenistis.

Taverna Nas (☎ 22750 71486; Nas; mains €6-10) This simple taverna set on a high bluff over Nas beach has superb views of the coast and western sea at sunset. Although a bit touristy,

it serves hearty portions of Greek standbys and fresh fish.

FOURNI ISLANDS ΟΙ ΦΟΥΡΝΟΙ

pop 1469

The little archipelago of Fourni, once upon a time a pirate's lair, lies peacefully between Ikaria and Samos. With only three villages dotting an otherwise rugged and hilly landscape, Fourni is now a lair for travellers seeking total peace. The islands' far-flung, secluded beaches are immaculate, and its fishing fleet's reputation for supplying the best seafood is upheld as far away as Athens. Abundant in long sunsets and rocky old pirates' coves, Fourni will appeal to artistic types, hikers and swimmers.

The islands' port, Fourni (also called Kampos), has most of its accommodation, as well as a central beach and other close-by beaches. The much smaller Hrysomilia, 10km north, is connected to it by Fourni's only road. In the very south, the monastery of Agios Ioannis Prodromos gazes over several captivating beaches.

Given its relative isolation, Fourni is surprisingly well served. It has a **doctor** (☎ 22750 51202), **police** (☎ 22750 51222) and **port police** (☎ 22750 51207). The main road runs perpendicular with the water and continues 100m to the *plateia*; along it resides a National Bank of Greece with ATM, a post office, a **pharmacy** (☎ 22750 51188) and, adjacent to the latter, an **internet café** (per hr €3; ☎ 11am-midnight).

Accommodation can be found through Ikarian travel agencies or through Maria Kalountzou at **Fourni Island Tours** (☎ 22750 51546), located just up from the waterfront on the road to the *plateia*. There are a few signposted domatia as well, such as the well-maintained **Nectaria's Studios** (☎ 22750 51365; d/tr €35/45) on the harbour's far side.

Fourni's exemplary fish tavernas are clustered along the waterfront; try the local speciality, grilled lobster at **Psarotaverna O Mitlos** (☎ 22750 51407; mains from €8). For heavier fare, and to meet some animated local characters, follow the wafting Greek music and smell of roasting meat up to the main *plateia* and the **Taverna Kali Kardia** (☎ 22750 51217; mains €5.50-9) on the left.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

Fourni lies on the Piraeus–Samos ferry route. Besides daily boats to Ikaria (€3.20,

40 minutes), five boats go weekly to Samos (€8, two hours).

HYDROFOIL

Like Ikaria, Fourni's hydrofoils operate in summer only; check with a local travel agency.

Getting Around

Two weekly caiques serve Hrysomilia and three go to Thymena, year-round, departing at 7.30am. Group day trips to pristine, but far-flung Fourni beaches cost €15 per person; book through **Fourni Island Tours** (☎ 22750 51546).

SAMOS ΣΑΜΟΣ

pop 32,814 / area 477 sq km

Lush forested mountains, sweet local wine, sacred ancient sites and almost tropical beaches all conspire to make Samos an immensely appealing island getaway. Since it's the busy ferry hub of the eastern Aegean islands and the jumping-off point for the nearby Turkish coastal resort of Kuşadası, however, visitors all too often just pass through without sampling the delights of what is, in fact, one of Greece's very best islands.

While high summer brings a plethora of package tourists to resorts around the pretty port towns of Vathy and Pythagorio, there is space aplenty for independent travellers seeking to get away from it all, too. Hiking

the interior brings one into rolling mountains redolent of pine, wildflowers and jasmine, dotted by welcoming traditional villages. Samos' long and curving coastline is crowned by cliff-top churches offering stunning views of secret coves where temperate turquoise waters gently lap.

Samos also boasts a distinguished history. Its identity as the legendary birthplace of Hera, wife of Zeus, is attested by the ruins of the sanctuary in her honour, the Ireon – one of several architectural wonders on the island where both the great mathematician Pythagoras and the hedonistic father of atomic theory, the 4th-century BC philosopher Epicurus were born. The most illustrious Samian of modern times, Themistoklis Sofoulis (1860–1949), was a respected prime minister and a pioneer of Greek archaeology.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Olympic Airlines (www.olympicairlines.com) Vathy (☎ 22730 27237; cnr Kanari & Smyrnis); Pythagorio (☎ 22730 61213; Lykourgou Logotheti) has four flights daily from Samos to Athens (€73, 40 minutes) and two flights weekly to Thessaloniki (€149, one hour). The airport is 4km west of Pythagorio.

FERRY

Domestic

With its two northern ports of Vathy (Samos) and Karlovasi, and Pythagorio port on the southern coast, Samos is the eastern Aegean's maritime hub. Ferries link it with the Do-

decane and Cyclades, and with the other Northeastern Aegean Islands. The exceptionally helpful **ITSA Travel** (☎ 22730 23605; www.itsatravelsamos.com; Themistokleous Sofouli), directly opposite the ferry terminal in Vathy (Samos), offers free luggage storage without a catch. Considering that ITSA boss Dimitris Sarlas owns four ferries operating from Samos, it's no surprise that it has the most up-to-date information on schedule changes.

Two ferries go daily to Piraeus (€34, 13 hours), three to Ikaria (€10, three hours). Five boats go weekly to Fourni (€8, two hours), four weekly to Chios (€12, four hours), and two weekly to Lesbos (€17, 11 hours), Limnos (€27.50, 11 hours) and Alexandroupoli (€32, 16 hours). Three ferries a week go to Naxos (€21, seven hours) and Paros (€18.50, eight hours). Five weekly ferries serve Mykonos (€25, six hours). Three ferries weekly sail to Patmos (€8, 2½ hours), four to Leros (€7, 3½ hours) and Kalymnos (€10, four hours), and one to Kos (€15, 5½ hours) and Rhodes (€30, nine hours).

In summer **Kallisti Ferries** (☎ 8011177700; www.kallistiferries.gr) run the high-speed *Corsica Express* five times weekly between Vathy (Samos) and Piraeus (€49, 6¾ hours) via Ikaria.

International

In summer two ferries go daily from Vathy (Samos) to Kuşadası (for Ephesus) in Turkey. The *Samos Star* leaves at 8.30am, while a Turkish-flagged vessel departs at 5pm. From Pythagorio there is a once-weekly boat to Kuşadası. In low season there are two ferries weekly. Tickets cost around €47 open return and €37 one way (plus €10 port taxes). Daily excursions are also available from May through October; the Sunday trip is especially popular; for an extra €25, you can also see Ephesus. Again, **ITSA Travel** (☎ 22730 23605; www.itsatravelsamos.com; Themistokleous Sofouli), opposite the ferry terminal in Vathy (Samos), is the place to book.

The ticket office will take your passport in advance for port formalities, though Turkish visas, where required, are issued once in Turkey. Visas are not required for day trips.

HYDROFOIL

In summer hydrofoils link Pythagorio twice daily with Patmos (€15, one hour), Leros (€16, two hours), Kos (€25.50, 3½ hours) and Kalymnos (€21, 2½ hours). From Vathy

(Samos) hydrofoils sail daily to Lipsi (€15, 1½ hours), once a week to Agathonisi (€11, 35 minutes) and twice weekly to Fourni (€14, 50 minutes).

Also from Vathy (Samos) one hydrofoil weekly serves Patmos (€20, one hour), Kos (€27), Leros (€24) and Paros (€32, four hours). Schedules are fluid, so double-check with the **tourist office** (☎ 22730 61389) or the **port police** (☎ 22730 61225) in Pythagorio. In Vathy (Samos), consult **ITSA Travel** (☎ 22730 23605; www.itsatravelsamos.com; Themistokleous Sofouli).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There's no airport shuttle bus; a taxi from Vathy (Samos) costs €12. Alternatively, take a local bus to Pythagorio, from where a taxi to the airport costs €5.

BUS

From Vathy (Samos) **bus station** (☎ 22730 27262; Ioannou Lekati) there are six buses daily on weekdays to Kokkari (€1.30, 20 minutes), eight to Pythagorio (€1.50, 25 minutes), seven to Agios Konstantinos (€1.90, 40 minutes) and Karlovasi (via the north coast; €3.30, one hour), and five to the Ireon (€2, 25 minutes) and Mytilini (€1.20, 20 minutes).

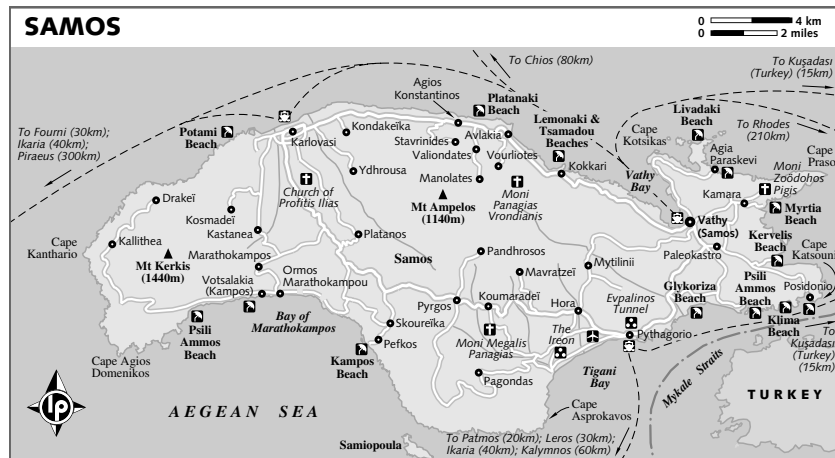
In addition, from Pythagorio five buses go daily to the Ireon (€1.20, 15 minutes) and four to Mytilini (€1.20, 20 minutes). Buy tickets on the bus. Services are reduced on Saturday and nonexistent on Sunday.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The best rates on car, jeep and motorcycle rental are offered at **Pegasus Rent a Car** (☎ 22730 24470, 6972017092; pegassussamos@hotmail.com; Themistokleous Sofouli 5), directly opposite the port entrance and next to ITSA Travel. The big international car-rental outlets, like **Hertz** (☎ 22730 61730; Lykourgou Logotheti 77) and **Europcar** (☎ 22730 61522; Lykourgou Logotheti 65), tend to be more expensive and less understanding of extra sand in the car than Pegasus' Dutch manager Carolina, who gladly hands out free advice, maps and sun hats to renters.

EXCURSION BOAT

In summer excursion boats travel four times weekly from Pythagorio to the monasteries of St John in Hora on Patmos (return €35), leaving at 8am. Daily excursion boats go from Pythagorio to the islet of Samiopoula



(including lunch €25), and a round-island boat tour begins from Pythagorio's harbour twice weekly (€40).

TAXI

The **taxi rank** (☎ 22730 28404) in Vathy (Samos) is by the National Bank of Greece. In Pythagorio the **taxi rank** (☎ 22730 61450) is on the waterfront at Lykourgou Logotheti.

VATHY (SAMOS) ΒΑΘΥ (ΣΑΜΟΣ)

pop 2025

Lively Vathy (also called Samos) is the island's capital, and lies in the fold of a deep bay on the northeast coast. Its historic quarter of Ano Vathy features red-tiled 19th-century hill-side houses, while a fine archaeological museum houses ancient Samian treasures. Like most Greek port towns, Vathy's curving waterfront is lined with bars, cafés and restaurants; however, more atmospheric and equally lively nightspots cling to the town's northeastern cliff side, just before the Pythagoras Hotel. A bit further on past the hotel are two pebble beaches, the most popular being Gagou Beach (about 1km north of the town centre).

Orientation

Facing inland from the ferry terminal, turn right to reach the central square of Plateia Pythagorou on the waterfront, recognisable by its four palm trees and lion statue. A little further along, and a block inland, are the leafy municipal gardens. The waterfront road is named after local son and statesman Themistoklis Sofouli. The bus station is on Ioannou Lekati.

Information

ATMs available include Commercial Bank, on Plateia Pythagorou's east side, and the National Bank of Greece, on the waterfront; several others are located there, too.

Diavlos NetCafe (☎ 22730 22469; Themistokeous Sofouli 160; per hr €4; ☎ 8.30am-11.30pm) Offers internet access.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 22730 28582) This summer-only office north of Plateia Pythagorou in a little side street can find accommodation.

Port police (☎ 22730 27890) North of the quay, one block back from the waterfront.

Post office (Smyrnis) Four blocks from the waterfront.

Pythagoras Hotel (☎ 22730 28422; Kallistratou 12; per hr €3) Offers internet access.

Samos General Hospital (☎ 22730 27407) Up the hill from the port, opposite the Pythagoras Hotel.

Tourist police (☎ 22730 27980; Themistokleous Sofouli 129) On the waterfront's south side.

Sights

Along with the old quarter of **Ano Vathy**, the relaxing **municipal gardens**, and **Roditzes and Gagou Beaches**, the town's main attraction is its **archaeological museum** (☎ 22730 27469; adult/student €3/2, free admission Sun; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun, last entry 2.45pm), one of the best in the islands. Exhibits attest to the greatness of Samos during the rule of Polycrates (6th century BC), the most famous being the gargantuan (5.5m) *kouros* (male statue of the Archaic period), plucked from the Ireon (Sanctuary of Hera; p605) near Pythagorio and the largest standing *kouros* ever produced. Many other statues, most also from the Ireon, as well as bronze sculptures, stelae and pottery, round out the collection.

Sleeping

Pension Dreams (☎ 22730 24350; Areos 9; d with/without balcony €30/25; ☎) This small but central *pension* overlooks the harbour from a hill top. Pride of place goes to the expansive rooftop studio; if that's taken, try for a balcony room with garden views. The friendly owner speaks a bevy of languages.

ourpick Pythagoras Hotel (☎ 22730 28422, 6944518690; www.pythagorashotel.com; Kallistratou 12; s/d €20/35; ☎ Feb-Nov; ☎) This friendly budget hotel run by Stelios Mihalakis and family offers the best of both worlds: the attentive service and serenity of a hotel, and the free-wheeling sociability of a hostel. Many rooms have sea-facing balconies. Meet like-minded independent travellers for a drink on the outdoor terrace, and enjoy good inexpensive home-cooked meals. It also has a shop and internet access, and a pebble beach just below. To arrange free pick-up from the ferry or bus station, ring Stelios, or inquire at ITSA Travel, opposite the port.

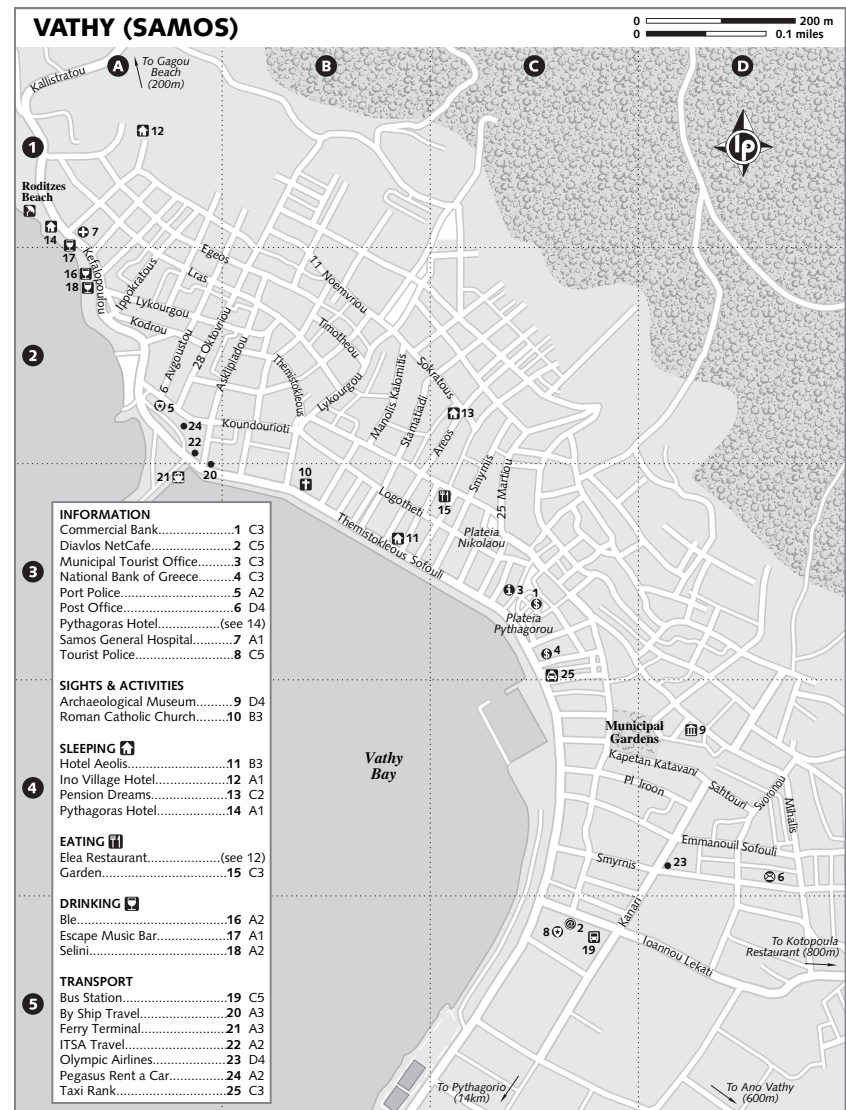
Hotel Aeolis (☎ 22730 28377; www.aeolis.gr; Themistokleous Sofouli 33; s/d incl breakfast €45/60; ☎) This grandiose and very central waterfront hotel that attracts a slick Greek crowd features two pools and a Jacuzzi, as well as a taverna and a frequently packed bar below. Rooms are ample and modern, though with less of a personal touch than at the smaller places in town. Light sleepers should factor in the nocturnal street noise from the café strip below.

Ino Village Hotel (☎ 22730 23241; www.inovillage.gr; Kalamis; s/d incl breakfast from €59/74/100; ☎) With its central courtyard pool flanked by ivy-strewn, balconied white buildings, Ino Village is a citadel of subdued elegance. While this miniresort is sometimes booked out by tour groups, it never endangers the stylish quietude that also draws discerning independ-

ent travellers. The hotel's Elea Restaurant is patronised by nonguests also.

Eating

Kotopoula (☎ 22730 28415; Vlamaris; mezedhes around €4, mains around €6) While tourists have taken to this little restaurant in the backstreets, it remains a local favourite known for its spit-roasted



HIDDEN BEACHES OF EASTERN SAMOS

Despite being only a few kilometres from Samos' capital, the jagged eastern coast is rarely visited by tourists, making it perfect for adventurous, off-roading swimmers and sun worshippers. The sultry beaches here are frequented only by locals and the tiny coves along the coast by very few.

A regular car or motorcycle will suffice for most of this route, though the complete day-tour requires a 4WD.

Set your odometer at Vathy (Samos) port and drive northwards, passing the Pythagoras Hotel on your left. At the 2.5km mark a left-hand dirt road leads down to a sheltered cove. At the 4.4km mark are other accessible, though little visited coves.

The best secret beach, however, an aquamarine, sandy cove, appears far down below at the 5.2km mark; to see it, pull over by the miniature model church standing alongside the road. Park here and walk backwards 500m, or drive back the same distance to the gated church facility reading (in Greek letters) *Paidikes Kataskinoseis Ieras Mitropoleos Samou kai Ikarias*. Park (without blocking the gate) and go down the grassy path through the bamboo about 200m to find your own private beach heaven.

Continuing along the coast, a signposted road at the 6.7km mark veers inland to the **Church of Profitis Ilias** (another 3km); it offers stunning views of Vathy (Samos) and the coast and islets sprawled below.

Continuing north on the main road, less than 1km after the Profitis Ilias turn-off, is a signposted dirt road leading, after another 2.6km, to **Livadaki Beach**. Here, tropical azure waters lap up against soft sand in a long sheltered cove with facing islets. Only Greeks in the know come to Livadaki, which has a beach bar with colourful and comfy soft chairs and music day and night. The water is warm and very shallow for a long way out, and Livadaki's hedonistic yet mellow summer beach parties easily spill into it.

Back at the turn-off for Livadaki Beach, continue east 5km to the fishing hamlet of **Agia Paraskevi**, which has a shady pebble beach and multicoloured boats moored offshore. This beach, popular with Greek families, also has a meat-and-seafood taverna, **Restaurant Aquarius** (☎ 22730 28282; Agia Paraskevi; mains €5-8).

After this, the road worsens on a white-knuckle course along the cliff through thick countryside. There are magnificent sea views and occasional unmarked revelations, like the cryptic ruins of the **Church of Agios Haralambos**, and the **Chapel of Agios Antonios**. After 3km of olive groves, you'll reach the paved road coming west from **Kamara** village. Follow the signs left to the enormous **Moni Zoódouhou Pigis** (☎ 22730 27582; ☎ 10am-1pm & 6-8pm Sat-Thu), which has great coastal views and is worth visiting if open.

From the Kamara turn-off, the road downwards leads after 1.7km to the lovely **Myrtia Beach**, another long pebbled stretch visited mainly by local Greeks.

To continue down the coast, drive from Myrtia inland towards Kamara for 2.2km, and then turn left on a narrow, paved shortcut 3.5km; at the intersection, turn left and then left again at the stop sign 2.1km further on, arriving after another 2km at the appealing **Kerveli Beach**. From here it's another 3km to **Platanaki Beach**. Some 6km further is **Posidonio**, where the southeastern coast ends with the pebbled cove at **Klima Beach**, which has gentle waters, some cafés and great views of Turkey opposite.

To do it all in one day, fill up on petrol in advance, start early and be prepared for some adventurous driving. As elsewhere in Greece, swimmers should avoid rocky outcroppings where potentially hostile, hard-biting eels lurk, and look out for sea urchins. For comprehensive, free planning assistance, ask for Aussie Mick Daly, at **ITSA Travel** (☎ 22730 23605; www.itsatravelsamos.com; Themistokleous Sofouli) in Vathy (Samos).

chicken. Follow Ioannou Lekati inland for 800m and look for it on the left, in the shade of a grand plane tree.

Garden (☎ 22730 24033; Manolis Kalomiris; mains €4-9) Greek specialities stand out at this south-

ing spot off Lykourgou Logotheti. The aptly named restaurant is located on a tree-filled outdoor terrace within a garden.

our pick **Elea Restaurant** (☎ 22730 23241; Kalamí; mains from €8-10) Located on the terrace of the Iono

Village Hotel, with contemplative views over Vathy and its harbour below, the Elea serves invigorated Greek cuisine and international dishes as well, while doing fine renditions of old classics like swordfish *souvlaki* (cubes of meat on skewers). Samian wines are well represented. Beware dedicated barman Dimitrios when he tries to whip you up one of his patented shots of tequila with lemon and ground coffee.

Drinking

Nightlife in Vathy (Samos) has a decidedly Greek flavour to it, especially when compared to the more Europeanised Pythagorio and the beach resorts. While the bulk of the bars congregate along the waterfront in the town centre, just as busy and more aesthetically pleasing are the hill-side bars over the water on Kefalopoulou, between La Calma restaurant and Pythagoras Hotel. These bars, which include **Escape Music Bar** (Kefalopoulou), **Ble** (Blue; Kefalopoulou) and **Selini** (Kefalopoulou), are distinguished not by their music (invariably, modern pop) but by their outside lighting, which shines on the gently rippling water below to dazzling, hypnotic effect.

PYTHAGORIO ΠΥΘΑΓΟΡΕΙΟ

pop 1327

Located on the sunny southeastern coast and the place of the island's ancient capital, World Heritage-listed Pythagorio boasts the bulk of Samos' archaeological sites. Its yacht-lined harbour flanked by touristy restaurants may make it seem twee, but Pythagorio is a place of real interest, for its sites, its flowering backstreets and for the fine nearby beaches. All boats travelling south of Samos dock at Pythagorio, from where day trips also depart to Samiopoula islet.

Orientation

From the ferry quay, turn right and follow the waterfront to the main street, Lykourgou Logotheti, a turn-off to the left. Most services are here. The central square (Plateia Irinis) is further along the waterfront. The bus stop is on the south side of Lykourgou Logotheti.

Information

Commercial Bank (Lykourgou Logotheti) Has ATM.

Digital World (☎ 22730 62722; Pythagora; per hr €4; ☎ 11am-10.30pm) Has internet access.

National Bank of Greece (Lykourgou Logotheti)

Port police (☎ 22730 61225)

Post office (Lykourgou Logotheti)

Tourist office (☎ 22730 61389; deap5@otenet.gr; Lykourgou Logotheti; ☎ 8am-9.30pm) The friendly and informative staff advise about the historical sites and sleeping options, provide maps, bus timetables and information about ferry schedules, and also exchange currency.

Tourist police (☎ 22730 61100; Lykourgou Logotheti) Left of the tourist office.

Sights

Samians took the lead locally in the 1821 War of Independence; the major relic of that turbulent time is the **Castle of Lykourgou Logotheti**, built in 1824 by resistance leader Logothetis on a hill at the southern end of Metamorfofis Sotiros, near the town car park. The **city walls** extend from here to the Evpalinos Tunnel, which can also be reached along this path.

The **Pythagorio Museum** (☎ 22730 61400; Town Hall, Plateia Irinis; admission free; ☎ 8.45am-2.30pm Tue-Sun) is not as good as the one in Vathy (Samos), but it does contain some nice finds from the Ireon.

Exiting Pythagorio towards the northeast, traces of an **ancient theatre** appear on a path to the left. The right fork past the theatre leads to **Moni Panagias Spilianis** (Monastery of the Virgin of the Grotto; ☎ 22730 61361; ☎ 9am-8pm), which, as the name might suggest, indeed has a lovely cool cave that makes for a welcome temporary respite from summer heat.

EVPALINOS TUNNEL ΕΥΠΑΛΙΝΟ ΟΠΥΤΜΑ

Back in 524 BC, when Pythagorio (then known as Samos) was a bustling metropolis of 80,000 people, securing reliable sources of drinking water became crucial. To solve the problem, ruler Polycrates put his dictatorial whims to good use, enlisting teams of labourers to dig into a mountainside according to the exacting plan of his ingenious engineer, Evpalinos. The result was the 1034m-long **Evpalinos Tunnel** (☎ 22730 61400; adult/student €4/2; ☎ 8.45am-2.45pm Tue-Sun), parts of which can be explored today. In mediaeval times locals used the tunnel as a hide-out during pirate raids.

The Evpalinos Tunnel is actually two tunnels: a service tunnel and a lower water tunnel visible from the walkway, deep below to the right. While the tunnel itself is wide enough, not everyone can get into it, as the entrance stairway is both low and has very narrow walls, with no grease provided.



If walking, reach the tunnel from the western end of Lykourgou Logotheti. If driving, a sign points to the tunnel's southern mouth after entering Pythagorio from Vathy (Samos).

Sleeping

In high summer, when foreign tour companies clamp down, book in advance.

Hotel Alexandra (☎ 22730 61429; Metamorfosis Sotiros 22; d €25) There are only eight rooms, but they are lovely and some have sea views. The enclosed garden is especially nice on hot summer days.

Pension Despina (☎ 22730 61677; pansiondespina@yahoo.gr; A Nikolaou; s/d €30/40) A clean, quiet little *pension* on Plateia Irinis, the Despina offers simple studios and rooms with balconies; some have kitchenettes. It also has a relaxing back garden.

Hotel Evripili (☎ 22730 61096; fax 22730 61897; Konstantinou Kanari; s/d €45/60) A friendly and modern hotel with well-appointed, cosy rooms off the waterfront; some have balconies.

Polixeni Hotel (☎ 22730 61590; fax 22730 61359; d €65; 🚽) This homey place on the waterfront has nicely furnished, clean and comfortable

rooms with balconies and very amiable staff. A good bet.

Eating

Pythagorio's waterfront is lined with restaurants, their multilingual menus hinting at the target market; explore the backstreets for more homey fare.

Elia (☎ 22730 61436; mains €7-10) One of the newer restaurants in town, Elia gets high marks from locals for sophisticated Greek and international fare, though it's a bit on the pricey side. It's located at the waterfront's far end, before the town beach.

Restaurant Remataki (☎ 22730 61104; mezdedhes €4-6, mains €7-10) Near Elia, the Remataki has a nice waterfront balcony and some splashy light meals; salad with rocket leaves, Cretan *dakos* (tomato and cheese on oil-softened rusks) and *dolmadhes* (rice wrapped in vine leaves) are all recommended. The almost unrecognisable *tyropitakia* (small fried cheese pies) should, however, be avoided.

Poseidonas (☎ 22730 62530; mains €6-12) Next door to Remataki, the Poseidonas specialises in seafood with an international flair.

AROUND PYTHAGORIO

The Ireon Το Ηραίον

To judge merely from the scattered ruins of the Ireon, Samos' ancient sanctuary of Hera located 8km west of Pythagorio, it would be impossible to imagine the magnificence of the rituals enacted along the Sacred Way. This path, once flanked by thousands of marble statues, led from the city to the World Heritage-listed **Ireon** (☎ 22730 95277; adult/student €4/3; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), built at the legendary birthplace of Hera. However, enough survives to provide a glimmer of insight into the divine sanctuary that was actually four times larger than the Parthenon.

Built in the 6th century BC on marshy ground, where the River Imbrasos enters the sea, the Ireon was constructed on the site of an earlier Mycenaean temple. Plundering and earthquakes since antiquity have left only one column standing, though extensive foundations remain. There is something deeply disconcerting about the headless statues of a family, the Geneleos Group, from whose number the giant *kouros* statue in the museum at Vathy (Samos) was taken (for more details, see p600). Other remains on the site include a stoa, more temples and a 5th-century Christian basilica.

Mytilinii Μυτιληνιοί

Skeletons of prehistoric animals, including forerunners of the giraffe and elephant, are displayed at this inland village's **palaeontology museum** (☎ 22730 52055; admission €2.50; 🕒 10am-2pm), northwest of Pythagorio. For more (human) skeletal relics, **Agia Triada Monastery** (☎ 22730 51339; 🕒 8am-1pm Mon-Sun) features an ossuary and a lovely rural setting. Hardy walkers can reach it from the museum.

A MATTER OF MEASUREMENTS

While the obsession with getting the 'proper pint' may seem a modern one, the ancient Greeks, too, were fixated on measuring their alcohol. Pythagoras, that great Samian mathematician (and, presumably, drinker) came up with an ingenious invention that ensured party hosts and publicans could not be taken advantage of by guests aspiring to inebriation. What he came up with was dubbed the *dikiakoupa tou Pythagora* – 'The Just Cup of Pythagoras' – a mysterious multiholed drinking vessel that holds its contents perfectly well, unless one fills it past the engraved line, at which point the glass drains from the bottom and the naughty drinker is punished for gluttony.

Today faithful reproductions of the *dikiakoupa tou Pythagora*, usually made of colourful, glazed ceramic, are available in gift shops on Samos, a reminder of the Apollan Mean (the ancient Greek maxim of Apollo): 'Everything in moderation.'

Beaches

Sandy **Psili Ammos** (not to be confused with the beach near Votsalakia) is the finest beach near Pythagorio. Gazing across at Turkey, this lovely cove is bordered by shady trees and has shallow waters good for kids. If you fall in love with the place and want to be there at its quietest times, a few tavernas nearby rent rooms. To get there take the bus from Vathy (Samos) or an excursion boat (€15) from Pythagorio. If driving, you must take the Pythagorio-Vathy road north for a few kilometres and turn east where the beach is signposted. A unique pond on the left, 1km before the beach, comes to life in spring with the arrival of pink flamingos.

Glykoriza Beach, nearer Pythagorio, is a clean, pebble-and-sand beach that hosts a few hotels.

SOUTHWESTERN SAMOS

Pythagorio to Drakei Πυθαγόριο προς Δρακίους

Driving west from Pythagorio brings you into spectacular mountain scenery with stunning views of the south coast, though the craggy forests are littered with charred trees from previous wildfires. This route also features many little signposted huts, where beekeepers sell the superlative but inexpensive Samian honey – stop in for a free sample and walk away with a jar.

The southwest coast of Samos held out against mass tourism for longer than the north, but the best beaches are starting to attract the inevitable resorts; tourism is still quite low-key, however, and you can find many secluded wild spots.

The drive from Pythagorio to the pebble beach at **Ormos Marathokampou** passes through

wonderful mountains and the unvisited little villages of **Koumaradei** and **Pyrgos**. From the beach, it's a 6km drive inland to **Marathokamphos**, which has panoramic views of the immense **Bay of Marathokamphos**. Some 4km west of Ormos Marathokampou is **Votsalikia** (often called Kambos), which has a long, sandy beach. There's an even nicer one 2km further at **Psili Ammos**. Beach-side tavernas prepare fresh fish on the grill and in huge skewers, and there are many domatia around.

Forging on past Psili Ammos takes you on the rugged western route skirting **Mt Kerkis**. From here until the villages of **Kallitheia**, and **Drakei** where the road abruptly terminates, the coast is almost totally undeveloped and isolated – a real treat for the adventurous.

NORTHERN SAMOS

Vathy to Karlovasi Βαθύ προς Καρλόβασι From Vathy (Samos), the coastal road heading west passes many beaches and resorts, first among them **Kokkari**, 10km out of town. Once a little fishing village, Kokkari is now a popular holiday resort with a long, narrow pebble beach, a favourite with windsurfers for its strong summer winds. There are plenty of decent rooms, studios and tavernas available.

The popular nearby beaches of **Avlakia**, **Lemonaki** and **Tsamadou** are the most accessible for walkers staying in Kokkari. The latter two are clothing optional. Continuing west past the beaches brings you into increasingly leafy country, and a left-hand turn-off leads, after 5km, to the lovely mountain village of **Vourliotes**. From here it's a 3km hike to **Moni Panagias Vrontianis**, the island's oldest surviving monastery, built in the 1550s. Vourliotes is marked out by its multicoloured, shuttered houses clustered on a central square, and can also be reached by a footpath from Kokkari.

Retracing the route back to the coast road, continue west until the signposted left-hand turn-off for the enchanting village of **Manolates**, 5km further up the lower slopes of Mt Ampelos (known as the Balcony of Samos). Set amid thick forests of pine and deciduous trees, and made up of some truly gorgeous traditional houses, Manolates is nearly encircled by mountains and offers a cool alternative to the sweltering coast, impressive views of which can be had from the upper village. Manolates is also a paradise for hikers and bird lovers, who can count on being serenaded by nightingales, warblers

and thrushes. The villagers have shown a fondness for tourism, with numerous shops selling handmade ceramic art, icons and natural products. Despite the popularity of the place with organised groups, Manolates still makes a welcome refuge from the hectic summer scene down below, and is integral to the Samos experience.

Back on the coast heading west, the road continues through **Agios Konstantinos**, a pretty, flower-filled village before **Karlovasi**, Samos' third port. Karlovasi has a more quiet, workaday feel and sees most of its visitors only for ferry connections. The nearest beach is the sand-and-pebble **Potami**, 2km west of town.

Sleeping

In Kokkari, **EOT** (Greek National Tourist Organisation; ☎ 22730 92217) can find you accommodation. The office is next to the Greek Telecommunications Company (OTE; telephone office), about 100m after the large church by the bus stop.

Studio Angella (☎ 22730 94478, 21050 59708, in Athens 6972975722; Manolates; d €25; ♿) The best place to stay in Manolates is this collection of five studios built into the side of a hill. The modern rooms have kitchenettes for self-caterers, and from the balconies there are sweeping views over the mountains to the sea.

Traditional Greek House (☎ 22730 94331, 22730 94174; Manolates; studio €30; ♿) There is only one studio available in this large old house behind the Despina Taverna in central Manolates, so phone in advance. Otherwise ask at the taverna. The room is quiet, romantic and tastefully furnished – worth the trouble if you can get it.

Kokkari Beach Hotel (☎ 22730 92238; fax 22730 92381; Kokkari; d incl breakfast €68-73; ♿) This classy establishment is about 1km west of the bus stop. It's set back from the road in a pretty yellow building, an oasis of calm from the busy village. Rooms are modern and comfortably furnished, and there is a café across the road.

Aidonakastro (☎ 22730 94686; fax 22730 94404; Valiondates; d/tr €60/75) Located in Valiondates, a tiny village on the road to Manolates, these renovated apartments set in five traditionally furnished houses make for a forested respite from the touristy coast. English-speaking manager Yiannis can assist hikers in plotting out routes. A large taverna is adjacent.

Eating

Kokkari is full of resort-type restaurants and the usual tavernas; for dining that is more atmospheric and guaranteed fresh, head for the mountain villages.

Grill Café (☎ 22730 93291; Vourliotes; mains from €5)

This little taverna on the left of Vourliotes' main square specialises in mixed vegetarian mezedhes, though it does have some hearty meat fare; try traditional sausages in pitta.

Loukas Taverna (☎ 22730 94541; Manolates; mains €4-6) Since it's located at the tip-top of Manolates village, you work up an appetite just trying to get to this well-signposted taverna. While the magnificent views of mountains and sea from the outdoor balcony seem an ample enough reward for the effort, the fried zucchini flowers, hearty meat portions and local muscat wine really make it worthwhile. For dessert, Loukas also serves a tempting array of home-made cakes.

Despina Taverna (☎ 22730 94043; mains €5-7) This little taverna, halfway up the hill in Manolates, serves *mayirefta* (ready-cooked meals) and a good assortment of meats. It's almost as good as the Loukas Taverna, and a better bet if you're tired of walking.

CHIOS XIOS

pop 53,817 / area 859 sq km

Although Chios (*hee-os*) is one of Greece's largest and most unique islands, most of the 'foreigners' who visit it are diaspora Greeks with familial ties. Yet despite its low profile, Chios has much to offer, from sandy beaches, extraordinary caves and medieval stone villages, to remote mountains, unusual museums and a thoroughly Hellenic nightlife. Southern Chios is the only place where mastic (a kind of gum) trees can be fruitful, and the island as a whole has a history of maritime greatness.

Chios is one of those islands that grows on you slowly, but has a lasting effect. Its people are reserved, but friendly, very hospitable and surprisingly cosmopolitan; indeed, you will meet many whose shipping careers have taken them 'round the world. With its excellent home-style cooking, authentic villages and endless opportunities for solitude on a coastline largely untouched by organised tourism, Chios remains one of the great unknown Greek island getaways.

History

Chios is one of the big ones, not only in size, but also in historical and economic importance. Like Samos and Lesvos, its proximity to Asia Minor (Turkey's Karaburun peninsula lies just 8km away, across the Chios Straits) gave it a turbulent history of great successes and terrible tragedies. Many of Greece's grand old shipping dynasties hail from Chios and its dependencies, Inousses and Psara. Under the Ottomans, Chios' monopolistic production of mastic – the sultan's favourite gum – brought Chians wealth and special privileges.

At the same time, during the Greek War of Independence, thousands were slaughtered by the Turks. A century later the 'Great Idea' (Megali Idea) for the liberation of the Anatolian coast unfolded with a naval assault from Chios – and ended with the Greek armies being driven back into the sea, as waves of refugees from Asia Minor flooded Chios and neighbouring islands.

Some Greeks argue that Christopher Columbus was a Chian, an intriguing possibility that cannot be entirely proven or disproven (see boxed text, p613).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Between Aegean Airlines and Olympic Airlines, Chios has five flights daily to Athens (€42, 50 minutes), five weekly to Thessaloniki (€66, one hour 10 minutes) and two weekly to Lesvos (€32, 25 minutes). **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 22710 20359; www.olympicairlines.com; Leoforos Egeou) is in Chios Town. The airport is 4km from Chios Town. There's no shuttle bus; a taxi to/from the airport costs €6.

FERRY

Domestic

In summer there's at least one ferry daily to Piraeus (€29, eight hours) and Lesvos (€14, three hours). A weekly ferry serves Thessaloniki (€36, 18 hours) via Limnos (€23, 11 hours), while another serves Alexandroupoli (€27.20, 12½ hours) via Lesvos. Three boats go weekly to Samos (€12.50, four hours), and one weekly to Kos (€19.80, nine hours) and Rhodes (€31.40, 15 hours). Buy tickets from **NEL Lines** (☎ 22710 23971; fax 22710 41319; Leoforos Egeou 16) in Chios Town.

Miniotis Lines (☎ 22710 24670; www.miniotis.gr; Neorion 23) in Chios Town runs small boats

twice weekly to Karlovasi (€10, four hours) and Vathy (€11, 4½ hours) on Samos. Three times weekly these boats also travel to Fourni (€12.40, 7½ hours) and Ikaría (€13, 8½ hours). Minitotis also has three boats weekly to Psara (€9.90, 3½ hours). Its boats occasionally dock at the harbour, near the corner of Leoforos Egeou and Kokali.

The little *Oinoussai III* serves the Inousses archipelago (€3.80 one way, 1¼ hours, daily). It mainly leaves Chios in the afternoon and Inousses in the morning, necessitating an overnight stay. Purchase tickets on board. **Sunrise Tours** (☎ 22710 41390; Kanari 28) in Chios Town also runs day trips to Inousses (€20) twice weekly in summer. Daily water taxis go

between Langada and Inousses (€35, shared between the passengers).

International

Boats to Turkey run year-round from Chios. From May to October daily ferries to Çeşme leave Chios at 8.30am and return at 6.30pm; on Sunday it returns at 5pm. The fare is €22 one way and €25 return. Get further information and tickets from **Minitotis Lines** (☎ 22710 24670; www.minitotis.gr; Neorion 23). **Sunrise Tours** (☎ 22710 41390; Kanari 28) does a day trip to İzmir via Çeşme for €40, which includes boat transport to Çeşme and then a bus to and from İzmir, one hour away. Turkish visas, where required, are issued upon arrival in Çeşme.

HYDROFOIL

From April to September three hydrofoils weekly serve Lesbos (€19.50, two hours) and Piraeus (€33, six hours).

Getting Around

BUS

From the **long-distance bus station** (☎ 22710 27507; www.ktelchios.gr; Leoforos Egeou) in Chios Town, there are four buses daily in summer to Pyrgi (€2.70), three to Mesta (€3.10) and four to Kardamyla (€3.10) via Langada (€1.70). Two weekly buses serve Volissos (€4.10). Buses also do the beaches of Kampia, Nagos and Lithi. Services are reduced on weekends. Up-to-date schedules for these and all other destinations, with prices, are listed on the KTEL-Chios website (www.ktelchios.gr).

Buses to Karfas Beach are serviced by the blue (city) bus company. Schedules are posted at both the **local bus station** (☎ 22710 22079), south of the public gardens, and the long-distance bus station.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Chios Town's car-rental outlets include **Aegean Travel** (☎ 22710 41277; aegeantr@otenet.gr; Leoforos Egeou 114), below Chios Rooms.

TAXI

Chios Town's **taxi rank** (☎ 22710 41111) is on Plateia Vounakiou.

CHIOS TOWN

pop 23,779

The island's port and capital, also called Chios, is on the central east coast, and home to almost half of the island's inhabitants. Like

many island capitals, it features a long waterfront lined with cafés and a noisy large street hugging the water. Behind it, however, is a quieter, intriguing old quarter, where some lingering traditional Turkish houses stand around a Genoese castle and city walls. There's also a fun market area, and spacious public gardens where an open-air cinema operates on summer nights. The nearest decent beach is at Karfas, 6km south.

Orientation

Most ferries dock at the northern end of the waterfront; north of this is the old Turkish quarter, called Kastros. Getting off the ferry, turn left and follow the waterfront to reach the town centre. Turn right onto Kanari to reach the central square of Plateia Vounakiou. Northwest of it are the public gardens; southeast is the market area. Most shopping is found south of Plateia Vounakiou. Facing inland, the local bus station is to the right of the public gardens; the long-distance bus station to the left. Most hotels are near the waterfront, on the opposite end from the ferry berths.

Information

The National Bank of Greece and most other banks are between Kanari and Plateia Vounakiou. Several ATMs are also on the waterfront (Leoforos Egeou).

Aegean Travel (☎ 22710 41277; aegeantr@otenet.gr; Leoforos Egeou 114)

InSpot Internet Café (☎ 22710 83438; Leoforos Egeou 86; per hr €2.40; ☎ 24hr)

Municipal Tourist Office (☎ 22710 44389; infochio@otenet.gr; Kanari 18; ☎ 7am-10pm Apr-Oct, until 4pm Nov-Mar) Information on accommodation, car rental, bus and boat schedules, plus a useful free book, *Hiking Routes of Chios*.

News Stand (☎ 22710 43464; cnr Leoforos Egeou & Rodokanaki) Sells multilingual papers and books, like Lonely Planet guides *Greece* and *Turkey*.

OTE (Dimokratias Roidou) Public telephone.

Police (☎ 22710 44427; cnr Polemidi 1 & Koundouriotou)

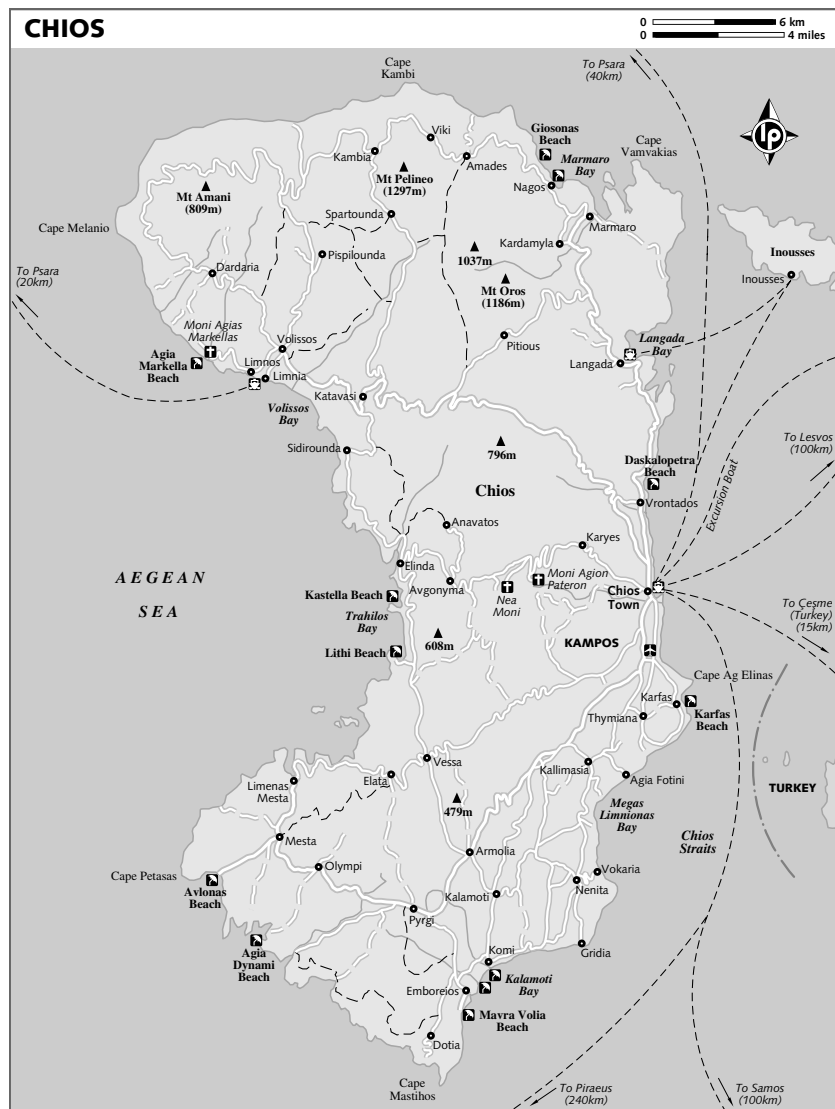
Port police (☎ 22710 44432; Neorion)

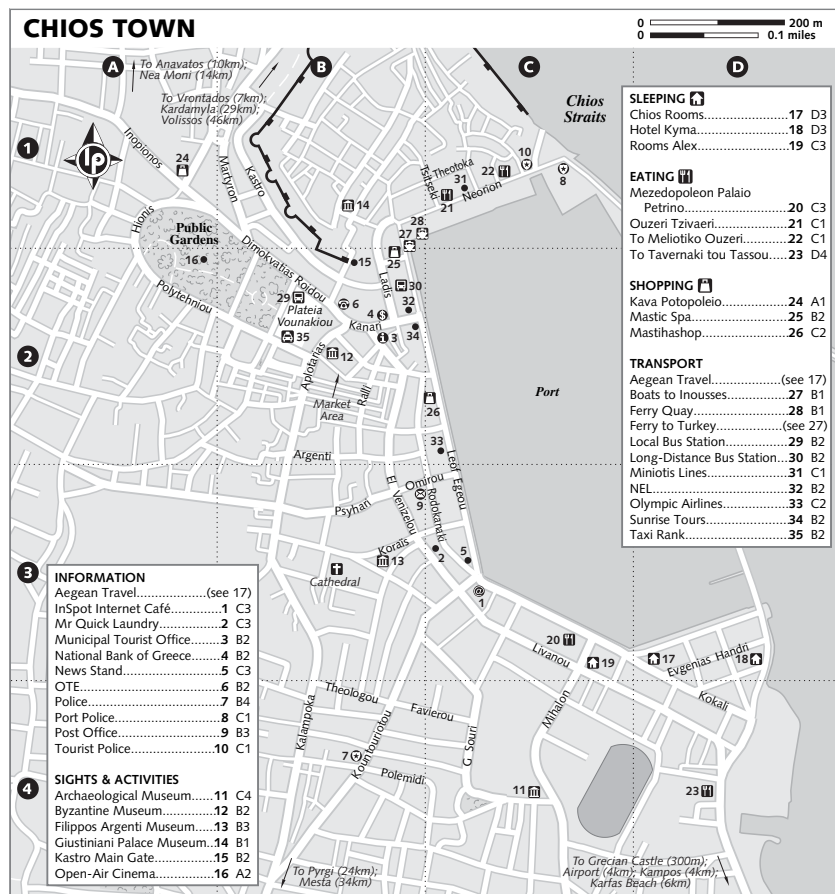
Post office (☎ 22710 44350; Omirou 2) One block behind the waterfront.

Tourist police (☎ 22710 44427; Neorion)

Sights

The idiosyncratic **Filippos Argentis Museum** (☎ 22710 23463; Korais; admission €1.50; ☎ museum & library 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 5-7.30pm Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat), in the same building as the impressive **Korais**





Library, contains embroideries, traditional costumes and portraits of the wealthy Argentis family. Born in Marseilles in 1891, Argentis devoted his life to researching the history of Chios and wrote many significant works.

The **archaeological museum** (☎ 22710 44239; Mihalon 10; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-2.45pm Tue-Sun) contains sculptures, pottery and coins dating from the Neolithic period. Closed at the time of writing, the **Byzantine Museum** (☎ 22710 26866; Plateia Vounakiou) is housed in a former mosque, the Medjitie Djami. Its collection of sculptures dates from the 14th- to 15th-century Genoese occupation.

Within the Kastro's main gate is the tiny **Giustiniani Palace Museum** (☎ 22710 22819; admission €2 Mon-Sat, €1 Sun; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun). Its restored

Byzantine wall paintings include important 13th-century frescoes of the prophets.

The **Public Gardens** make a nice spot for relaxing; in summer Hollywood hits are projected here in an enclosed **open-air cinema** (tickets €6). Shows start at 9pm.

Sleeping

Chios' municipal tourist office keeps a full list of domatia – useful for those wishing to avoid the waterfront accommodation's street noise.

Chios Rooms (☎ 22710 20198, 6972833841; www.chiosrooms.gr; Leoforos Egeou 110; s/d/tr €25/35/45) An eclectic, hostel-like neoclassical house on the waterfront, Chios Rooms is the inspiration of its owner, native New Zealander Don. Full of

vintage furnishings, traditional rugs and lofty ceilings, the place has character, though bathrooms are separate. The rooftop 'penthouse' has its own terrace. Having spent over 30 years in Greece, owner Don has much wisdom to impart about Greek life, and life in general, and will readily do so over a beer; the dude abides.

Rooms Alex (☎ 22710 26054; Livanou 29; s/d €30/45) This friendly place is visible for its bright roof garden adorned with various flags. If the interior seems dark, imagine the dark of a ship's hull: kindly owner Alex Stoupas was a sea captain for 21 years, and his lovingly handmade model ships decorate each of the simple but clean rooms. The *kapetanios* will pick you up for free from the ferry, and speaks English, French and Spanish. Book ahead in summer.

Hotel Kyma (☎ 22710 44500; kyma@chi.forthnet.gr; Evgenias Handri 1; s/d/tr incl breakfast €61/78/97; ☎) This century-old converted mansion impresses from the first sight of its central marble stairway (hewn in 1917). The rooms in the old wing live up to this promise, with stately décor, billowing curtains and sea-view balconies with red marble walls (ask for room 29). What makes the Kyma more than just another period hotel is its service; owner Theodoros Spordilis wants you to fall in love with Chios, and solves problems in English, Italian and German. There's free wi-fi, and transport and stays in the Kyma's sister hotel (p612) in Kardamyla can be arranged.

Eating & Drinking

There's good eating in Chios Town, especially near the waterfront; nightlife, too, primarily happens here, in a contiguous set of bars filled by the unworried heirs of shipping empires.

Ouzeri Tzivaeri (☎ 22710 43559; Neoreion 13; mains €3-6) The sort of food strong enough to soak up ouzo (the Tzivaeri serves 10 kinds) is dished out at this friendly portside eatery. You might need a cast-iron gut to lay into oil-drenched, sun-dried tomatoes, grilled cod strips and traditional Chios sausages – but then again, that's what a good *ouzerie* is all about.

Mezodopoleon Palaio Petrino (☎ 22710 29797; Leoforos Egeou; mains from €7) The only reason to lament Chios' wonderfully warm weather, perhaps, is that diners never have to sit indoors and enjoy the Palaio Petrino's splendidly painted interior. No matter, the food is good enough to enjoy inside or out. Try

the *tyrokafteri* (spicy cheese dip) and *ktapodi krasato* (octopus in wine sauce) with some hearty Northern Aegean wine.

To Meliottiko Ouzeri (☎ 22710 40407; Neoreion; mains around €4-7) Some Chians live in fear of the immense portions ladled out at the Meliottiko; this no-nonsense stronghold of the Greek culinary pantheon is where you fill your stomach while waiting for the ferry.

To Tavernaki tou Tassou (☎ 22710 27542; Livanou 8; mains €6-8) This family-friendly eatery near the sea offers standard taverna fare, Chios' own Kampos Lemonade and an adjoining kid's land that will help keep restless ones pacified during dinner.

Beer Academy (☎ 22710 27542; Livanou 8; ☎ 6pm-2am) This branch of the popular Thessaloniki watering hole is a welcome alternative to most bars' Greek holy trinity of Amstel, Heineken and Mythos, with over 30 brews representing Boston to Belgium and beyond.

Shopping

Mastihashop (☎ 22710 81600; Leoforos Egeou 36) Get mastic-based products such as lotions, toothpaste, soaps and condiments here.

Mastic Spa (☎ 22710 28643; Leoforos Egeou 12) The place for mastic cosmetics.

Kava Potopoleio (☎ 22710 23190; Inopionos 4) Fine wines and many kinds of European beer are sold in this little shop below the Public Gardens.

CENTRAL CHIOS

North of Chios Town, visit **Vrontados**, where you can sit on the legendary stone chair of Homer, the **Daskalopetra**. Immediately south of Chios Town is the **Kambos**, a lush area with citrus trees, where wealthy Genoese and Greek merchant families from the 14th century onwards kept summer homes. It's worth visiting to see the walled mansions, some restored, others crumbling, and elaborate gardens. The fairly extensive Kambos is best toured by bicycle, moped or car.

Chios' main beach resort, **Karfas**, lies nearby, 6km south of Chios Town. The sandy beach, with a few fancy hotels and development, can make it get crowded.

In Chios' centre is **Nea Moni** (admission free; ☎ 8am-1pm & 4-8pm), a grand 11th-century Byzantine monastery and a World Heritage-listed site. Since it's undergoing extensive renovations, some buildings may be closed. Nea Moni was built to commemorate a

miraculous event: the appearance of an icon of the Virgin Mary before three shepherds. The monastery was once one of the richest in Greece, and the most pre-eminent artists of Byzantium were commissioned to create the mosaics in its *katholikon* (principal church of the monastic complex).

Disastrously, during the Greek War of Independence in 1822, the Turks torched the monastery and massacred its monks. Macabre monastic skulls are lined in the ossuary at the little chapel. Another catastrophe occurred with the earthquake of 1881, when the dome of the *katholikon* caved in, damaging the mosaics. Despite this, they still rank among the country's greatest surviving examples of Byzantine art. Nea Moni is now inhabited by nuns.

At the end of a silent road, 10km away, is spectral **Anavatos**, filled with abandoned grey-stone houses built on a precipitous cliff. In 1822, during the savage Turkish reprisals, the villagers hurled themselves over it rather than be taken alive. A place of great solemnity and significance to the Chians, Anavatos should be visited, though the narrow, stepped pathways leading between the houses to the summit can be dangerous, and the route is often closed.

More happily, the nearby 11th-century hill-top village of **Avgonyma** is currently undergoing a bit of a revival. **Spitakia** (☎ 22710 81200; www.spitakia.com; d from €90) offers unique studios in restored buildings.

The beaches on Chios' mid-west coast are quiet and good for solitude seekers, though they're not the island's most spectacular. **Lithi Beach**, the southernmost one, attracts the majority of sunbathers.

NORTHERN CHIOS

Lonesome northern Chios, its coastal towns once a stronghold of shipping barons, is full of craggy peaks (Mt Pelineo, Mt Oros and Mt Amani), deserted villages and barren hill sides. The drive north from Chios Town along the eastern coast is astonishing, and brings you through bizarre, boulder-strewn mountains like from some other planet.

After the small coastal settlements of **Vrontados** and **Langada**, you come to the area's main villages, **Kardamyla** and **Marmaro**, the ancestral homes of many wealthy ship-owning families, though you would never know it from the humble architecture. Streets are so narrow, in fact, that some buildings' walls feature painted

lines so buses won't barge into them. There is an earthy sand beach at Marmaro, but better pebble ones exist 5km further at the fishing village of **Nagos**, and at **Giosonas**, 1km beyond. The beaches have very clear water and a few tavernas, but not much shade.

After Nagos, the coast road heads northwest and upwards, skirting craggy Mt Pelineo (1297m). This is one of Chios' most remote areas. **Amades** and **Viki** are two tiny villages you pass before **Kambia**, high up on a ridge overlooking bare hill sides and the sea. Here choose between turning south on the central road through the mountains, or continuing along the coast.

The latter option passes through wild, empty hills on a jagged road before reaching the pebbly **Agia Markella Beach** and the **monastery** above it, also named after Agia Markella, the island's patron saint. Some 8km southeast is **Volissos**, legendary birthplace of Homer, with its impressive Genoese fort. Volissos' port, **Limnia**, is not particularly striking but has a taverna. From Volissos the coastal road continues south until Elinda, where it returns eastwards to Chios Town.

Sleeping

Hotel Kardamyla (☎ 22720 23353; kyma@chi.forthnet.gr; Marmaro; s/d/tr €61/78/97; 🚽) Although the 1970s architecture is somewhat dated, the simple rooms are clean and well maintained at this quiet beachfront hotel in Marmaro. What keeps people coming back, however, is the warm hospitality of the joint Greek-Turkish Spordilis family, who invite their guests to join them for a patio lunch. Since this is the sister hotel of Chios Town's Hotel Kyma (p611), you can also arrange a stay from there.

SOUTHERN CHIOS

The evocative south of Chios is unique, not only in Greece but in the world: it's the only place where the gum-producing mastic tree can be cultivated, a blessing which for centuries made the area wealthy and self-reliant. The 20 villages comprising the Mastihohoria (Mastic villages) feature arid scrublands of rolling hills, criss-crossed with elaborate stone walls running throughout the placid olive and mastic groves.

Two of these villages, Pyrgi and Mesta, are particularly unique for their aesthetic appeal, the former filled with houses decorated in unusual colourful patterns, the latter a car-free,

walled settlement inhabited since Genoese colonisers built it in the 14th century.

Mastic was a very valuable commodity, one prized for its medicinal powers since antiquity; as capital of the Mastihohoria, Mesta had to be especially well fortified. The town is well preserved today, and is a great, romantic place where children can run around safely. It's a good base for hill walks, exploring hidden southern beaches and caves, and getting back to nature by participating in mastic and olive cultivation with the locals.

Pyrgi Πύργι

pop 1044

Located 24km southwest of Chios, the striking village of Pyrgi (peer-*ghi*) is the Mastihohoria's largest, and truly an eye-opener. The vaulted, narrow streets of this fortified village pass through buildings with façades decorated in intricate grey and white patterns, some geometric and others based on flowers, leaves and animals. The technique used, called *xysta*, requires coating the walls with a mixture of cement and black volcanic sand, painting over it with white lime and then scraping off parts of the lime with the bent prong of a fork to reveal the matt grey beneath.

Pyrgi's central square, where the road passes through, is flanked by a few tavernas

and shops and the little 12th-century **Church of Agios Apostolos** (☎ 10am-1pm Tue-Thu & Sat). The church's 17th-century frescoes are well preserved, and the façade of the larger church, on the square's opposite side, has the most impressive *xysta* designs in town.

On the main road, just east of the central square, is a house with a small plaque, attesting to its former Italian occupant, one Christopher Columbus (see boxed text, below).

While Pyrgi itself is a must-see, for sleeping Mesta is the place. However, if you do stay, there are signposted domatia and **Gian-naki Rooms** (☎ 22710 25888, 6945959889; fax 22710 22846; d/quad €35/80; 🚽). Giannaki used to offer just simple rooms, but now offers a large house for up to eight people (€100).

Emboreios Εμπορείος

Six kilometres southeast of Pyrgi, Emboreios was the Mastihohoria's port back when the mastic producers were real high rollers. Today it's a quiet place known for the beautiful, though shadeless **Mavra Volia Beach**, named for its black volcanic pebbles. Ask around for domatia.

For eating, try the shady, atmospheric **Porto Emborios** (☎ 22710 70025; mains €5-7), decorated with fishing nets and hung chillies and garlic; they attest to its vegetable dishes (roast meats are well represented, too).

COLUMBUS OF THE RED EARTH

Despite being one of the world's greatest seafaring nations, Greece's Renaissance sea captains didn't get to the Americas – right?

According to a theory long propounded by some Greeks (and foreign philhellenes), great explorer Christopher Columbus was no Italian from the streets, as the conventional wisdom has it; rather, he was a Chios-born Greek, of noble Byzantine descent.

While the argument can't be proven, it is intriguing. Born at a time when the Ottomans were conquering Byzantium, the enigmatic Columbus identified himself simply as a citizen of the Genoese Republic, of which Chios was then a part. His unique signature involved Greek characters, and he called himself *Columbus de Terra Rubra* (Columbus of the Red Earth) – a reference, supporters believe, to the unique reddish soil of southern Chios.

In fact, the Columbus (Kolombos) surname is common in the Mastihohoria; some families date back to the explorer's time. Indeed, Spanish King Ferdinand could find no trace of Columbus' alleged family in Genoa. And Columbus' sea-captain log, the 'official' one in Latin, stated false information, whereas his 'secret' one, in Greek, gave true coordinates.

Why, then, did Columbus not come out of the Genoese closet? Being Greek Orthodox, one explanation goes, Columbus could never have convinced a Catholic king to fund his expeditions, which popular history records as being financially motivated. However, in his own writings, Columbus reveals that divine inspiration and a missionary fever fuelled his desire to explore new worlds. Indeed, at a bleak time when the expanding Ottoman Empire threatened to overrun Christian Europe, could a powerless Byzantine prince have done anything less?

Mesta Μεστά

Mesta (mest-*aa*h) is the culmination of the southern Chios experience: indeed, it is one of the most unique experiences you can have anywhere in all of Greece. A miniature, car-free Rhodes, this mediaeval castle town features appealing stone alleyways that are intertwined with flowers and intricate balconies, and is completely enclosed by thick defensive walls.

The town was built in the 14th century by the island's Genoese overlords, to keep pirates and would-be invaders out. It's an ingenious example of mediaeval defensive architecture, featuring a double set of walls, four gates and a pentagonal structure. Since all of the rooftops are interconnected, with the right company you can actually walk across the entire town. Dastardly locals have been known to settle scores by dumping water on an adversary's head from the rooftops.

Although the streets are labyrinthine and narrow, you can't get lost in Mesta. The action is found around the central square, near the enormous church of the Taxiarchon; on the tranquil, secluded laneways, rooms for rent are indistinguishably attached to the residences of local elders, who sit outside, the occasional cat darting past and the laughter of running children filling the air.

Mesta is a very relaxing place to stay and the accommodation and eating offerings are some of the island's best. It's also a great base for outdoor activities, and has great nearby beaches and other attractions. Currently local leaders are trying to realise a vision for a low-key, sustainable tourism matching the town's aesthetic and the peaceful natural environment. In addition, newly built accommodation of unprecedented elegance has made Mesta an option for those who want serenity – and sophistication.

ORIENTATION

Buses stop on the main road, on the *plateia* known locally as Gyros. Facing the town from the bus shelter, turn right and then immediately left; a sign points to Mesta centre. The central square, with rooms, a taverna, café and church, is called Plateia Taxiarchon.

SIGHTS

Two churches of the Taxiarches (Archangels) exist in Mesta, the older and smaller one dating from Byzantine times and featuring a mag-

nificent 17th-century iconostasis. The larger church, just off Plateia Taxiarchon, was built in the 19th century, created entirely by the townspeople's donations and labour. It has an ornate outer patio, huge, glittering chandeliers and very fine frescoes.

ACTIVITIES

Aside from its historical attractions, Mesta and its neighbouring mastic fields, beaches and cave (opposite) offer great opportunities to participate in traditional Chian farming, cooking and cultural activities, as well as the full range of outdoor activities. The fun and well-informed folks at **Masticulture Ecotourism Activities** (☎ 6976113007; www.masticulture.com) can arrange all activities, as well as sell tickets, find accommodation and provide general travel information. Located on Plateia Taxiarchon closest to Mesaonas restaurant, Masticulture's office has a cool reading room for visitors, who can sink into cosy sofas and armchairs with organic gardening guides, maps and travel-related books in English.

SLEEPING & EATING

Rooms are plentiful in Mesta; head to Plateia Taxiarchon and the local travel agency, **Masticulture Ecotourism Activities** (☎ 6976113007; www.masticulture.com), or else ask in the adjacent Mesaonas restaurant for the proprietors listed following. Masticulture can also help find rooms in Limenas Mesta, Olympi and elsewhere.

Anna Floradis Rooms (☎/fax 22710 76455; floradis@internet.gr; s/d €40/50; 📶) The friendly Anna Floradis, who speaks French and some English, has rooms, studios and self-catering suites in different but equally lovely parts of Mesta, all with TV and air-con.

Dhimitris Pipidhis Rooms (☎ 22710 76029; house €60; 📶 year-round; 📶) The friendly, English-speaking Dhimitris and Koula Pipidhis have two traditional houses for rent in Mesta. Each has two bedrooms, a *pounti* (the traditional small Mesta house atrium), kitchen and washing machine. Book in advance in summer.

Mesta Medieval Castle Suites (☎ 22710 76345; www.medievalcastlesuites.com; d/t incl breakfast €94/117; 📶) Discerning-yet-discreet luxury accommodation has finally come to Mesta with the new Medieval Castle Suites. The rooms are spread out throughout the village, blending in seamlessly with the neighbouring houses. Open the door, however, and you have ultrachic rooms with all modern amenities, including

flat-screen laptops; the only thing lacking, perhaps, is a bathtub. Décor is minimalist and obeys the contours of the space. The staff is very professional and helpful, and can pick you up from the ferry or airport.

our pick **Mesaonas** (☎ 22710 76050; Plateia Taxiarchon; mains €5-9) For years Kyria Dimitra has been serving excellent and hearty country food at this restaurant outside on the far end of the central square (the Mesaonas café for drinks and ice cream is opposite). Everything is great; try the roast chicken and Greek salad for a nourishing lunch. Everything is local, right down to the *souma* (mastic-flavoured firewater). You should order the mixed meat plate to share, but be sure to pounce on the incredibly delicious beef *keftedes* (fritters) before they're all gone.

Limani Meston (☎ 22710 76389; Limenas Mesta; mains €6-10) For excellent and unique seafood dishes, come to this little waterfront fish taverna of Limani Meston. The *astakomakaronada* (lobster pasta) and special *atherinopita* (small fried fish with onions) are both heartily recommended.

Around Mesta

Just north of Mesta on the coast is the village's small port of **Limenas Mesta**. It has a pretty harbour of colourful fishing boats and tavernas, and nearby pebble beaches. **Avlonia Beach**, 7.3km west of Mesta, is the best one around.

Some 3km southeast of Mesta is the small agricultural village of **Olympi**, like Mesta and Pyrgi, a mastic-producing village characterised by its defensive architecture. The road south towards the coast leads after 5km to the splendid **Cave of Sykia** (admission €4; 📶 10am-8pm Tue-Sun), a 150-million-year-old cavern discovered accidentally in 1985. Some 57m deep, the cave is filled with weird, multicoloured stalagmites and other rock formations, shaped like giant white organs and phantasmal figures. Selectively lit by floodlights and connected by a series of platforms with handrails, the cave is safe, though somewhat slippery. With its marvellous lighting and colours, the cave could be the set for some underground adventure movie. Guided tours are held every 30 minutes, the last at 7.30pm.

BACK TO MASTIC

One day, 32-year-old Vasilis Ballas and longtime girlfriend Roula had had enough: they decided, as one does, to quit their well-paying jobs in hectic Athens' IT sector and move to a small village in southern Chios, to cultivate mastic trees.

'Our friends thought we were crazy,' chuckles Vasilis, whose ancestors came from Mesta, the enchanting fortress town at the heart of Chios' Mastihohoria. 'But now many of them are saying, "I wish I was brave enough to do what you did!"'

Cultivating the trees was harder than the two had imagined. It consumed many of their summer mornings, involved 'hurting' the tree by making little gouges to encourage the mastic sap to drip out, and required endless hours of cleaning the sticky, pearly white substance before sending it off to the producers. The experience led the Ballas' to think bigger, and now they have created Masticulture Ecotourism Activities (opposite), an offbeat, environmentally friendly travel service that encourages visitors to get their hands dirty by participating in the traditional livelihood of southern Chios.

Masticulture's year-round activities include a 'mastic walking tour' through shady fields gleaming with the dark green, bushy trees, where travellers can learn how mastic cultivation is done first-hand. Along the way, they can pick tomatoes, cucumbers, melons and more from the Ballas' organic garden; at the end of the tour, a feast of traditional mezedhes follows. Other unusual activities arranged by Masticulture include olive gathering in winter, underwater sea urchin hunting in summer and grape-pressing (by foot, of course) in autumn.

Masticulture's other activities include trips to ouzo and olive-oil factories, hidden beaches and tours of mediaeval buildings, as well as seminars for professional photography, icon painting, traditional music and dance, and special activities for children.

For Vasilis and Roula, it was, in fact, the desire to have kids that influenced their decision to leave Athens. 'Mesta, and Chios in general, is a very safe and fun place for children,' says Vasilis. 'And there's so much to enjoy here. With Masticulture, our goal is to help visitors to Mesta enjoy the real Mastihohoria experience.'

After the cave, continue on the good-quality dirt road to the coast. The road goes through a little-used military range, as the signs (unhelpfully, Greek only) warn. Although there's no danger, this is not a place for random hiking; stick to the road. After 2km the road ends at a small church overlooking **Agia Dynamis Beach**, a curving, sandy cove where the water is a stunning combination of blues and greens, flecked with white wavelets. The beach is completely pristine and undeveloped, and you're likely to have it all to yourself.

INOUSSES ΟΙΝΟΥΣΣΕΣ

pop 1050 / area 14 sq km

A little-visited group of islands off Chios' northeast coast, Inousses is nonetheless a place of huge significance: some one-third of Greece's shipping barons (the so-called *arhontes*) came from there. The descendants of ship-owning families from Kardamyla who first settled here in 1750, these Inoussans amassed huge fortunes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Traces of Inousses' vital seafaring identity remain in its well-disciplined merchant marine academy, its nautical museum and its fishing fleet, and, of course, in the grand holiday homes of the Inousses shipping aristocracy, now enclosed in Athens, London or New York.

Inousses is deliberately kept tranquil and untouristed, some say, to keep it the private paradise of the locals and their illustrious relatives. This image has been overblown, however; Inousses is surprisingly lively in summer, with an open-air cinema, a couple of cafés and nighttime beach parties. You'll find rooms, a hotel and even whole houses for rent. Nevertheless, it has also retained its serenity and remains a soothing refuge from the outside world.

The islands' port and only town, also called Inousses, is a pleasing enough assortment of white stone houses crowned by two churches, with a waterfront lined by colourful boats where the plaintive cry of seagulls, and not domatia owners hawking rooms, greets travellers arriving from the ferry. Facing the port from the water is a small and green sculpted mermaid, the Mother of Inoussa (Mitera Inoussiotissa), who protects and watches over mariners.

Orientation & Information

Disembarking from the ferry, walk left along the waterfront and turn right to the central *plateia*, where the tavernas, museum and most of the town's services are found. Further along the waterfront are some cafés and, above them, a small church. A post office and National Bank of Greece stand side by side, around the corner from the Nautical Museum. However, there's no ATM, locals explain, because having one would mean unemploying one of the bank's two workers.

Doctor (☎ 22710 55300)

Dimarhio (Town Hall; ☎ 22710 55326)

Hotel Thalassoporos (☎ 22720 51475, 22710 55222) Just above Hotel Thalassoporos.

Police (☎)

Post Office (☎ 22710 55398; 🕒 9.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

Inousses has numerous hill-walking opportunities and untouched beaches. There's no tourist information, so ask for details at the *dimarhio* or the very helpful Hotel Thalassoporos. **Bilali Beach**, 2km from town, is the best nearby beach and in high summer has nightly parties. In summer an **open-air cinema** (tickets €4) near the central waterfront brings Hollywood hits to Inousses, nightly at 9.30pm.

Not only toy-boat aficionados will be impressed by Inousses' little **Nautical Museum** (☎ 22710 44139; Stefanou Tsouri 20; admission €1.50; 🕒 10am-1pm Mon-Fri), which celebrates the island's seafaring past. To create it, ship-owning *arhon* and museum founder Antonis Lemos donated his priceless collection of large model ships, which include early-20th-century commercial ships, whaling ships made of ivory and whalebone, and ivory models of French POW vessels from the Napoleonic Wars. However, the museum is more eclectic; along with these models (accompanied by vintage paintings of ships by eminent painter Aristeides Glykas), there's a swashbuckling collection of 18th-century muskets and sabres, a WWII-era US Navy diving helmet, a hand-cranking lighthouse made in 1864, antiquarian maps of Greece and, of course, the odd 6th-century-BC stone scarab seal and various Bronze Age antiquities.

In true Greek style, the museum is timed to close just before the afternoon ferry from Chios arrives and to open only after the morning boat back to Chios has left. Therefore you

may have to stay over for two nights just to see it, unless you can get someone to intercede on your behalf (Eleni at Hotel Thalassoporos is particularly helpful) and get it opened out of hours.

To really feel the significance of Inousses and its heritage, take the 10-minute walk from the museum to the **Church of Agia Paraskevi** on the hill; in its leafy courtyard above the sea stands the **Mausoleum of Inousses** (Nekrotafion Inousson), where the island's ship-owning dynasties have endowed the tombs of their greats with huge chambers, marble sculptures and miniature churches. It's a melancholy, moving place, and speaks volumes about the worldly achievements and self-perception of the extraordinary natives of these tiny islands.

Sleeping

There are allegedly 46 beds in private accommodation in Inousses town; ask at the *dimarhio*.

Hotel Thalassoporos (☎ 22720 51475; fax 22720 51476; s/d incl breakfast €40/50; 🕒) Friendly young Inoussan couple Eleni and Giorgos have breathed new life into this 30-year-old hotel. Although slightly dated, rooms are clean, all with TV, fridge and small balconies, with views of Inousses town's rooftops and the waterfront. Internet access is available. Eleni can also give general information, and help arrange house rental in more remote parts of the island. The hotel is a three-minute walk up a steep street on the ferry-dock side of the waterfront.

Eating & Drinking

Souvlaki Kostas (souvlaki €2.50) There's no name on this popular canteen above the central waterfront; you'll recognise it from the crowd happily munching outside, who know that cheerful Kostas, and his Brazilian sidekick Seline, serve the best *souvlaki* in Inousses.

Inomageireio To Pateroniso (☎ 22720 55586; mains €5-7) This whimsical taverna near the central *plateia* serves Greek standbys and whatever is the day's catch. Try a Greek salad with spongy feta and *kritamos* (rock samphire salad), along with a heads-and-all fry up of *atherinia* (minnows) and onions.

Naftikos Omilos Inousson (☎ 22720 55596; 🕒 9am-3am) Walk along the quiet waterfront long enough and you will reach this, the almost

chic bar of the Inousses Yacht Club. Its long bar and outdoor patio are filled mostly with young Greeks (and their vacationing diaspora relatives), and pop music plays till late.

Getting There & Away

The little *Oinoussai III* (€3.80 one way, 1½ hours, daily) usually leaves in the afternoon and returns in the morning, meaning you'll be staying overnight. Purchase tickets on board, or from **Sunrise Tours** (☎ 22710 41390; Kanari 28) in Chios Town. There are also twice-weekly day excursions in summer (€20), again with Sunrise Tours.

Daily **water taxis** (☎ 6944168104) travel to/from Langada on Chios. The one-way fare is €35, which is split between the passengers. There are comparably priced water taxis to Chios Town, too.

Getting Around

Inousses has no buses or car rental; ask in one of the tavernas for its one taxi.

PSARA ΨΑΡΑ

pop 422 / area 45 sq km

Still more remote Psara (psah-rah) is a rocky, sparsely vegetated island off Chios' northwest coast. The island has been populated since Mycenaean times. Like Inousses and Chios itself, it prospered in Ottoman times because of its wealthy ship owners. However, after the Psariots aided the War of Independence, an Ottoman fleet landed on 21 June 1824, butchering over 15,000 people and taking others as slaves. Today the few inhabitants occupy one settlement, also called Psara.

Although few make it here, and the accommodation and eating scene is limited, intrepid, peace-seeking travellers will enjoy this pristine speck in the sea well off the beaten track (or any track).

Getting There & Away

From Chios, ferries go to Psara daily except Saturday in summer (€10, three hours). Contact **Miniotis Lines** (☎ 22710 24670; www.miniotis.gr; Neorion 23) in Chios Town, or check with a local **agent** (☎ 22710 25848). A direct ferry to Lavrio in Attica (€20.80, 5½ hours) sails once weekly.

Weekly local caïques also run from Limnos (€5, three hours) on Chios' west coast, but departure times depend on prevailing weather conditions.

LESVOS (MYTILINI)

ΛΕΣΒΟΣ (ΜΥΤΙΑΗΝΗ)

pop 93,428 / area 1637 sq km

The third-largest island in Greece after Crete and Evia, Lesvos (Mytilini) is mountainous and fertile and prone, it seems, to always doing things in a big way. Some 11 million olive trees cling to Lesvos' rugged hills, yielding delectable, golden-hued oil by the tonne; the island also produces half of the world's ouzo, the aniseed-flavoured firewater revered as Greece's national spirit.

Culturally, too, Lesvos has gone above and beyond. From the musical composer Terpander and poet Arion of the 7th century BC, to 20th-century figures like Nobel

Prize-winning poet Odysseus Elytis and primitive painter Theofilos, the island has given birth to artists of genius. Under the great ancient philosophers Aristotle and Epicurus, an exceptional philosophical academy flourished on the island. Most famous, however, is Sappho, one of ancient Greece's greatest poets. Her sensuous, passionate poetry, apparently created for a select group of female devotees, has fuelled a modern-day cult that draws lesbians from around the world to pay homage to the poet in Skala Eresou, the west Lesvos beach village where she was born around 630 BC.

Appropriately enough, the stark natural beauty that inspired all these artists and thinkers itself derived from a great event: a massive prehistoric volcanic eruption that buried and transformed its surroundings, making western Lesvos into a treasury of prehistoric fossils and gems, and the only place outside of the USA with a petrified forest.

Indeed, it is the natural abundance that primarily draws visitors. Hiking the idyllic southern olive groves as well as bird-watching –

the island is the transit point and home to over 279 species of birds ranging from raptors to waders – are both very popular. Lesvos' long coastline, hardly touched by package tourism, is dotted with therapeutic hot springs and pristine beaches.

The island's festive nature, visible in the chic cafés and restaurants of the capital, Mytilini, comes to life with the midsummer *panigyria*, dating back distantly to Lesvos' passionate pagan past, with plenty of food, drink and music, as well as the racing of beautifully girded horses and the odd bull sacrifice.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Olympic Airlines (☎ 22510 28659; www.olympicairlines.com; Kavetsou 44), in Mytilini town, offers four flights daily to Athens (€76) and one daily to Thessaloniki (€87). There are two flights weekly to both Chios (€32) and Samos (€41), and five to Limnos (€46) and Rhodes (€58).

Aegean Airlines (☎ 22510 61120; www.aegeanair.com) has three daily flights to Athens (€68, one hour) and one to Thessaloniki (€84, one hour 10 minutes); its office is at the airport, which is 8km south of Mytilini town. An airport taxi costs €7 to €8.

To Heraklio in Crete, Sky Express has flights on Friday and Sunday (€119); buy tickets from **Piccolo Travel Tourism** (☎ 22510 23720; Pavlou Kountourioti 73a).

FERRY

Domestic

In summer NEL Lines goes daily to Piraeus (€35.60, 12 hours) via Chios (€14.60, three hours). Hellenic Seaways has a faster daily ferry to Piraeus (€38.10, 8½ hours), again via Chios (€18, two hours). Two ferries weekly serve Kavala (€26.90, 10 hours), via Limnos (€18.40, six hours). One boat weekly goes to Thessaloniki (€37, 13 hours), also via Limnos, and one weekly ferry serves Alexandroupoli (€21.50, nine hours).

Ferry ticket offices on the eastern side of Pavlou Kountourioti include **Zoumboulis Tours** (☎ 22510 37755; www.zoumboulis.com; Pavlou Kountourioti 69) and **Samiotis Tours** (☎ 22510 42574; fax 22510 41808; Pavlou Kountourioti 43).

International

In summer two daily ferries go to Ayvalık, Turkey (€35, one hour 15 minutes).

Getting Around

BUS

From Mytilini's **long-distance bus station** (☎ 22510 28873; El Venizelou), near Agias Irinis Park, there are two daily buses to Skala Eresou (€8, 2½ hours) via Eresos, five to Mithymna (Molyvos; €5.90, 1¼ hours) via Petra (€5.50, 1½ hours), and one to Sigrí (€8, 2½ hours). Five daily buses go to Plomari (€3.90, 1¼ hours) and four to Vatera (€5.30, 1½ hours), the latter via Polyhmitos. Travelling between these smaller places often requires changing buses in central Kalloni, which receives five daily buses from Mytilini (€3.90, one hour).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Mytilini's international rental chains include **Hertz** (☎ 22510 37355; Pavlou Kountourioti 87), though **Holiday Rent-a-Car** (☎ 22510 43311; Arhipelagos 21) is also good. Scooters and motorcycles are available along Pavlou Kountourioti.

FERRY

In summer there are half-hourly ferries across the Gulf of Yera (€1, five minutes), between Perama and Koundouroudia, near Loutra south of Mytilini town. Buses to Mytilini meet these ferries.

MYTILINI TOWN MYTIAHNNH

pop 27,247

Easygoing Mytilini, the port of Lesvos, is kept lively year-round thanks to its capital status and irrepressible student population. The laid-back attitude to life in Mytilini reflects ingrained political preferences (Lesvos was long a bastion of the left), but even more so, perhaps, its love of food, drink and the arts on an island known eternally for its poets and painters, its olive oil and wine.

As with most Greek port towns, the action is centred on the waterfront; however, Mytilini boasts bigger attractions than the average island capital. It is interspersed with palm-fringed churches, grand 19th-century mansions and several museums, the most remarkable being the Teriade, boasting paintings by Picasso, Chagall and Matisse. Handmade ceramics, jewellery and traditional products are available on and around the main shopping street, Ermou, and epicureans will be delighted by the town's many fine *ouzeris*. Mytilini's student-fuelled nightlife, concentrated around the waterfront bars, carries on during summer and winter, too.



Orientation

Ferries dock on the northern end of Mytilini's long and curving waterfront thoroughfare, Pavlou Kountourioti. Further up and along the thoroughfare is Plateia Sapphou (where a statue of Sappho stands); many restaurants, cafés and hotels are nearby. The main shopping street, Ermou, links this southern harbour with the ancient, but now disused, northern port.

East of the harbours, a large mediaeval fortress stands surrounded by pines. Both bus stations are centrally located: the long-distance bus station is next to Agias Irinis Park and the local bus station is on Pavlou Kountourioti, near Plateia Sapphou. The airport is 8km south on the coast road.

Information

Numerous banks and ATMs line Pavlou Kountourioti.

Bostaneio General Hospital (☎ 22510 43777; E Bostani 48)

EOT (☎ 22510 42511; Aristarhou 6; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri)

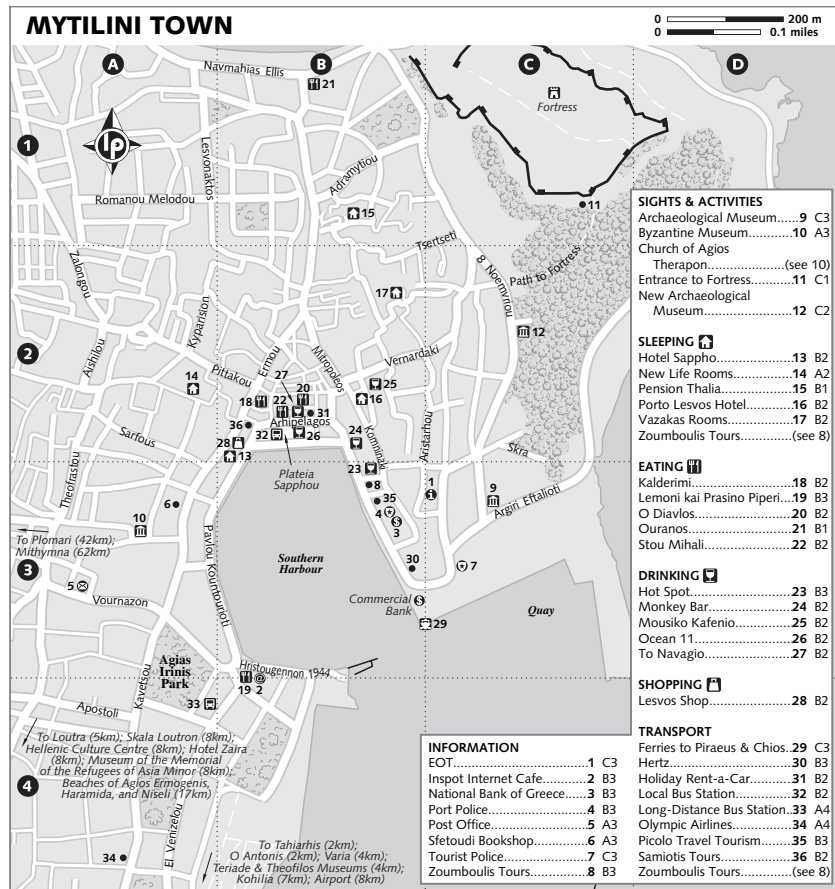
InSpot (☎ 22510 45760; Hristougennon 1944 12; per hr €2.40) Internet access.

National Bank of Greece (Pavlou Kountourioti) Has an ATM.

Port police (☎ 22510 28827) Next to Pico Travel Tourism.

Post office (Vournazon) West of the waterfront.

Sfetoudi Bookshop (☎ 22510 22287; Ermou 51) Sells good maps from Greece's leading Road Editions series; books on Lesvos include *39 Coffee Houses and a Barber's*



Shop, a beautiful photo narrative by eminent local photographer Jelly Hadjidimitriou.

Tourist police (☎ 22510 22776) On the quay.

www.lesvos.com Information on Lesvos.

Zoumboulis Tours (☎ 22510 37755; Pavlou Kountourioti 69) Sells ferry and plane tickets, runs boat trips to Turkey and rents rooms.

Sights & Activities

Mytilini's imposing, early Byzantine **fortress** (adult/student €2/1; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Tue-Sun) was renovated in the 14th century by Genoese overlord Francisco Gatelouzo, and later the Turks enlarged it again. It's popular for a stroll and the surrounding pine forest is perfect for picnics.

The **archaeological museum** (☎ 22510 22087; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 8am-7.30pm), one block north of the quay, has impressive finds from Neolithic to Roman times, including ceramic, somersaulting female figurines and gold jewellery. The ticket grants entry to the **new archaeological museum** (8 Noemvriou; ☎ 8am-7.30pm), 400m away, which portrays island life from the 2nd century BC to the 3rd century AD. Spectacular floor mosaics under glass are among the highlights here.

The bulbous dome of the **Church of Agios Therapon** crowns Mytilini's skyline, and is visible from almost everywhere on the waterfront. The church's ornate interior boasts a huge chandelier, an intricately carved iconostasis, priest's throne and a frescoed dome. The **Byzantine Museum** (☎ 22510 28916; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm) in the church's courtyard has valuable icons.

TERIADE & THEOPHILOS MUSEUMS

From the northernmost section of Pavlou Kountourioti, take a local bus 4km south of Mytilini to the village of **Varia**, where an unexpected treasure awaits: the **Teriade Museum** (☎ 22510 23372; adult/student €2/1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), with its astonishing collection of paintings by world-renowned artists like Picasso, Chagall, Miro, Le Corbusier and Matisse.

The museum honours the Lesvos-born artist and critic Stratis Eleftheriadis, who Gallicised his name to Teriade in Paris. Teriade was instrumental in bringing the work of primitive painter and fellow Lesvos native Theophilos to international attention.

The **Theofilos Museum** (☎ 22510 41644; admission €2; ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 6-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Oct & Apr, 9am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), lo-

cated next door, houses works commissioned by Teriade; several prestigious Greek museums and galleries display other more famous paintings of Theophilos, whose story followed the old pattern of many a great artist – living in abject poverty, painting coffee-house walls for his daily bread and eventually dying in the gutter.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Budget accommodation in Mytilini is scarce.

Zoumboulis Tours (☎ 22510 37755; Pavlou Kountourioti 69; r from €35) The travel agency rents simple, air-conditioned rooms.

Pension Thalia (☎ 22510 24640; Kinikiou 1; d €35) This friendly, family-run *pension* has cheery, clean rooms on a side street behind Ermou. There's not always someone at the door, so call in advance.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Sappho (☎ 22510 22888; sappho@microchip.gr; Pavlou Kountourioti 31; s/d/t €35/50/60; ☎) The default option on the waterfront, the Sappho is a somewhat staid, older hotel with the necessary amenities and, fortunately for late-night ferry arrivals, 24-hour reception. The harbor-side location means it gets street noise.

Vazakas Rooms (☎ 22510 46571; Bizaniou 17; d/tr €50/60; ☎) Once a budget choice, these domatia on the 2nd floor of a family house offer variety; some have balconies, others a kitchenette. All are clean and well maintained. It's just off Ermou, though it can be hard to find.

New Life Rooms (☎ 22510 42650; Ermou 68; s/d/t €30/50/70) Although the bristly green carpet out the front could come from a miniature-golf course, the recently redecorated rooms are bright and well furnished. The hotel, which also has a new outdoor bar, is central but quietly set on a side street.

Porto Lesvos Hotel (☎ 22510 22510; www.porto-lesvos.gr; Kominaki 21; s/d €60/80; ☎) Although the red carpets are a bit frumpy, and the rooms snug, some have panoramic views of Mytilini. The décor involves stone set in plaster. In its zeal to be a 'real' hotel, the Porto Lesvos offers toiletries, bathrobe and slippers.

Eating

The *ouzeries* listed in this section all have the seal of approval from local ouzo expert Leftheris Eleftheriadis (see boxed text, p622).

O Antonis (Tahiarhis; mezedhes €3-5; ☎ Mon-Sat) An institution with the locals, this simple *ouzerie* is 2km from the town centre, on a breezy hill top offering sublime views of the sea and Mytilini town. Try the *koutavakia* (fried baby shark), sardines and *kolios* (mackerel). O Antonis has only a few tables, and fills up on weekends and after 8pm.

Stou Mihali (☎ 22510 43311; Ikarías 7, Plateia Sapphou; mains €3.50-5; ☎ 9am-9pm) It's getting hard to find a free table at lunch at this tasty and inexpensive place serving *mayirefta*. Unlike many other such eateries, here you can combine half-portions and thus enjoy more variety. Everything is good; try the *soutzoukakia* (tomato-soaked beef rissoles), *imam baidi* (roast eggplant) and Greek salad.

our pick **O Diavlos** (☎ 22510 22020; Ladadika 30; mezedhes €3-6) What first attracts the eye in this unique *ouzerie* set in a lofty, wood-beamed building is the artwork lining the walls. Monthly exhibits show off local artists' works, which diners can purchase; might the next Theophilos be discovered here? However, aside from being an art lover, Diavlos owner Panayiotis Molyviatis crafts what might

just be the most satisfying and nourishing mezedhes in all of Lesvos. Local specialities include *gioulesmes* (a crunchy cheese pie) and *sfongatoa* (a sort of oven-baked cake made of zucchini, egg, onion and cheese). Also try the Turkish-flavoured beef kebabs on pitta bread with onions and *yiaourtlou kebab* (Greek yogurt). Music ranges from relaxed to *rembetika* (blues songs).

Ouranos (☎ 22510 47844; Navmahias Ellis; mezedhes €3-6) A popular *ouzerie* that looks across at Turkey from a breezy patio on the ancient northern port. Tempting mezedhes include *kolokythoanthi* (fried pumpkin flowers stuffed with rice), *ladotyri mytilinis* (the oil-drenched local cheese) and hefty servings of some of the most enormous calamari in the Mediterranean.

Kalderimi (☎ 22510 46577; Thasou 3; mezedhes €3.50-5, mains €7-10) Inconspicuously set on a shaded side lane, Kalderimi is another popular Mytilini *ouzerie*; try the tasty salted mackerel and sardines and fried zucchini flowers.

Lemoni kai Prasino Piperi (☎ 22510 42678; cnr Pavlou Kountourioti & Hristougennon 1944; mains €10-15; ☎ 7pm-1am) The poshest place in town, this

upstairs restaurant has great waterfront views and even better food, especially the Italian dishes. Try the simple yet exquisite tomato and mozzarella salad and tagliatelle amatriciana or tagliatelle alfredo with salmon. As expected, the wine list is deep; the Mexican offerings, however, remain somewhat of an unknown commodity.

Drinking

Most of Mytilini's cafés are strung together along the waterfront and double as bars at night, their blaring intermingled music creating a veritable cacophony for those sitting outdoors.

Mousiko Kafenio (cnr Mitropoleos & Vernardaki; ☎ 7.30am-2am) This relaxed, arty student café just in from the waterfront is full of colour, with eclectic paintings, mirrors and well-worn wooden fixtures.

To Navagio (☎ 22510 21310; Arhipelagos 23) A popular café-bar on Plateia Sapphou with comfy couches, perfect for a leisurely backgammon game and coffee.

Ocean 11 (☎ 22510 27030; cnr Arhipelagos & Pavlou Kountourioti; ☎ 7am-3am) This breezy patio café offers sweet frozen coffees by day, and becomes a slick and shiny bar by night.

Monkey Bar (☎ 22510 37717; Pavlou Kountourioti; ☎ 10am-3am) A big, thumping, packed night-spot on the water.

Hot Spot (☎ Pavlou Kountourioti; ☎ 10am-2am Mar-Oct) This intimate student bar has a warmer feel than its neighbours and plays more rock and roll.

Shopping

Lesvos Shop (☎ 22510 26088; Pavlou Kountourioti 33) This waterfront shop near the Hotel Sappho has all of Lesvos' distinctive natural products, from ouzos and olive oil and soap to jams, handmade ceramics, and local wine and cheese. Proceeds benefit the municipality.

Getting There & Away

Mytilini's **local bus station** (Pavlou Kountourioti), near Plateia Sapphou, serves destinations within the town and nearby Loutra, Skala Loutron and Tahiarhis. All other buses depart from the **long-distance bus station** (☎ 22510 28873; El Venizelou) near Agias Irinis Park.

SOUTH OF MYTILINI

Although it gets relatively few tourists, the small, olive-groved peninsula south of My-

tilini has several unique attractions. A long pebble beach 7km south on the coastal road opposite the airport hosts a decadent beach bar, **Kohilia** (☎ 6978773203; ☎ 8am-3am). Pulsating with house and techno music, and frequented by swimsuited students lounging on colourful couches and four-poster beds, Kohilia is a chilled-out hang-out on summer days; by night, however, it attracts several hundred young pleasure seekers who spill from the bar onto the beach, and sometimes into the water.

Somewhat quieter and more educational is the fishing village of **Skala Loutron**, 8km southwest of Mytilini on the Gulf of Yera. Here the **Hellenic Culture Center** (☎ 22510 91660; in Athens 21052 38149; www.hcc.edu.gr; 2-week courses €650) conducts intensive summer Greek-language courses, which attract students from the world over. Lessons are enhanced by cultural adventures, such as Greek singing and cooking classes, as well as by beach trips, olive-grove hikes and excursions to Turkey. Class sizes are deliberately small (25 students or less) and professional childcare is provided.

The course is held in a century-old olive-oil factory near the harbour, which has been restored quite splendidly into the **Hotel Zaira** (☎ 22510 91188; www.hotel-zaira.com; Skala Loutron; s/d €42/54), distinguished by lofty wood beams, nice stonework and home-cooked Greek food. Independent travellers can stay, too.

Also in Skala Loutron is the new **Museum of the Memorial of the Refugees of 1922** (☎ 22510 91086; admission free; ☎ 5-8pm), which commemorates the lost Greek culture of Anatolia, abruptly cut short by the population exchanges that occurred between Greece and Turkey in 1923 after the failed Greek offensive in Asia Minor. The museum features the photographs, documents, handmade clothes and silverwork of the refugees, as well as large wall maps showing over 2000 Anatolian villages that had been populated by Greeks until 1922 – and the places in Greece where the refugees were resettled. To arrange a special visit outside regular opening hours, ask at the Hotel Zaira.

Continuing 9km further south brings you to the peninsula's end, and the popular sand-and-pebble **Agios Ermogenis Beach** and **Haramida Beach**. The eastern stretch of the latter, **Niseli Beach**, is secluded under a bluff and separated by a headland from the main beach. What's more, the local community

AN OUZO EDUCATION

A few years ago the young Mytilene cartographer Leftheris Eleftheriadis was looking for a book on Greece's great national aperitif, ouzo. A man of Hemingwayesque appetites, Eleftheriadis was disappointed to find there was none; and so, along with friend Stathiadis Georgiadis, he embarked on a three-year odyssey around Greece in which the two imbibed more than 500 kinds of the aniseed-flavoured firewater – all in the name of research.

In their well-illustrated new book, *Ouzo: The Greek Spirit* (ROAD Editions, 2007), the authors catalogue every conceivable detail about all of Greece's ouzo producers, the history behind the drink, and the peculiar, secretive genius of the ouzo makers, who combine some 25 different ingredients in various proportions to concoct their own distinctive blends.

Unsurprisingly, some of the most unique ouzos the authors discovered were from Lesvos, which produces approximately 70% of Greece's ouzo, and half of all ouzo sold in the world. One small distillery, Pitsiladi from Plomari – the southern Lesvos capital of ouzo – follows a unique method. Its anise seeds are stuffed in a sack and then stored in the sea for a few days before they are added to the ouzo; the result is a slightly salty and strengthened taste.

In general, says Eleftheriadis, the 'island ouzos' are slightly more full bodied than the mainland Greek ouzos. But they all have their own idiosyncratic tastes and special foods that go with them. The well-fed authors found this out while sampling local mezedhes all over Greece – and stealing the recipes from little old ladies.

The ouzo makers, on the other hand, 'weren't about to share their secret recipes with us,' jokes Leftheris. Nevertheless, he can disclose some Greek customs for the better enjoyment of ouzo. 'Before opening the bottle, you should slap it three times on the bottom – to hurt it so it won't hurt you,' he says. 'And then wave it in a circle three times, so it won't make you dizzy. Then it's ready to drink.'

The *ouzeries* listed in the Mytilini Eating section (p621) have all received the Leftheris Eleftheriadis seal of approval.

provides **camping** (camp sites free), with toilets and showers, under a quiet canopy of pines on the bluff above the beach. The camping ground is located near the lovably eccentric **Karpouzi Kantina** (☎ 6977946809), a drinks-and-snacks wagon named after its mascot – an old skiff, painted to look like a giant watermelon. Enthusiastic owner Fanis also oversees the camping ground.

NORTHERN LESVOS

With its rolling hills garbed in pine and olive trees, peaceful beaches and the aesthetically harmonious traditional town of Mithymna (usually called by its old name, Molyvos), northern Lesvos has only partially revealed its secrets. While its olive-rich heritage is now being commemorated in Agia Paraskevi's new museum, tourism remains largely limited to Mythimna (Molyvos) and its low-key beach resort of Petra, along with other attractive beaches like Skala Sykamini and hot springs. There's plenty of bucolic authenticity in the villages surrounding Mt Lepetymnos, and off the northeast coast lie the enigmatic, unvisited Tomaronisia islands.

Mithymna (Molyvos)

Μίθυμνα (Μόλυβος)

pop 1497

While northern Lesvos' largest town has officially reverted to its ancient name of Mithymna, you're better off calling it Molyvos, as the locals do. This lovingly preserved town of narrow cobbled lanes and stone houses with jutting wooden balconies exemplifies traditional architecture of the Ottomans, under whose rule the town was politically and economically important. A relaxed stroll in the little streets of the upper town, crowned by a grand 14th-century Byzantine castle, gives a sense of those bygone times, while a dip in the invigorating north Lesvos waters down at the pebble-beached harbour at sunset is a perfect way to cap the day.

ORIENTATION

The bus stops on the main north-south road bisecting the town. Below this road is the waterfront, with a beach, several hotels and restaurants, and cafés on the northern end. Above the central road begins the upper town, consisting of narrow, winding streets, where some of the most atmospheric accommodation and restaurants are located. The so-called

agora (market), clustered with tourist shops, is further up. Above this is the castle.

INFORMATION

The National Bank of Greece, with an ATM, stands by the municipal tourist office. The Commercial Bank booth opposite also has an ATM.

Central Internet Café (per hr €4.40) On the port road.

Medical Centre (☎ 22530 71702)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 22530 71347) A small office on the left of Kastrou, between the bus stop and the fork in the central road.

Post office (Kastrou) Along the left of the street.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Mithymna (Molyvos) is all about wandering, with its little streets in the upper town lined with bright-shuttered, traditional stone houses wreathed in flowers. The town's crowning achievement, the ruined 14th-century **Byzantine-Genoese castle** (☎ 22530 71803; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun) stands guard over all from the top of the town; the steep climb is repaid by sweeping views of the town and the sea and Turkey shimmering on the horizon. Back in the 15th century, before Lesvos fell to the Turks, it was Genoese property and a feisty Italian woman called Onetta d'Oria, wife of the governor, repulsed an onslaught by the Turks by putting on her husband's armour and leading the people into battle from the castle. In summer a **drama festival** takes place here; ask the municipal tourist office for information.

Those seeking superlative beaches can take an **excursion boat** at 10.30am daily for Petra, Skala Sykamini and Eftalou. Prices start at €20, and sunset cruises and boat 'safaris' are also available. Inquire with **Faonas Travel** (☎ 22530 71630; tekas@otenet.gr) at the port.

Eftalou beach also has the **baths of Eftalou** (old bathhouse/new bathhouse €3.50/5; ☎ old bathhouse 6am-8am & 6-10pm, new bathhouse 9am-6pm), with their clear, cathartic 46.5°C water. The old bathhouse has a pebbled floor; the new one offers private bathtubs. These springs treat rheumatism, arthritis, neuralgia, hypertension, gall stones, and gynaecological and skin problems.

SLEEPING Budget

Over 50 registered, good-quality domatia exist in Mithymna (Molyvos). Look for signs, or arrange through the municipal tourist office.

Municipal Camping Mithymna (☎ 22530 71169; camp sites per adult/tent €5.50/3; ☎ Jun-Sep) This publicly run camping ground occupies an excellent shady site 1.5km from town and is signposted from near the municipal tourist office. If arriving before or after high season, call to ensure it's open.

Nassos Guest House (☎ 22530 71432, 6942046279; www.nassosguesthouse.com; Arionos; s/d €20/35) A fun, informal guesthouse with an international clientele and real personality, this refurbished Turkish mansion features brightly painted, though small, rooms with lovely little balconies overlooking the harbour. Bathrooms are separate. Tom, the affable Dutch manager, is unfailingly helpful, and also sells a useful book on local hiking routes for €8.

Captain's View (☎ 22530 71241; meltheo@otenet.gr; house €90-140; ☎) This restored old house is ideal for groups of friends or families, with its well-equipped kitchen, spacious balcony and lounge. The house has two bedrooms and a loft, and sleeps up to six people. There are no minimum-stay requirements, but book in advance in summer.

Midrange

Amfitriti Hotel (☎ 22530 71741; fax 22530 71744; s/d/tr incl breakfast €55/80/95; ☎ ☎) Just 50m from the beach, this snazzy traditional stone hotel has modern, tiled rooms and a refreshing garden pool. It fills up fast and deals with package tourists, but independent travellers are welcome.

Hotel Olive Press (☎ 22530 71205; www.olivepress-hotel.com; d with/without seaview €100/70; ☎ ☎) A converted olive-oil factory located on the beach, the Hotel Olive Press can get booked out by Northern European package tourists, though independent travellers are welcomed warmly, too. The rooms are very well done; especially evocative are those with balconies hanging out almost over the sea. With advance notice, pick-up can be arranged from Mytilini.

Hotel Sea Horse (☎ 22530 71630; www.seahorse-hotel.com; d incl breakfast €75; ☎) A good choice down in the harbour, the renovated Sea Horse is a friendly place with bright, breezy rooms and balconies overlooking the cafés and fishing boats. The hotel's small travel agency can arrange day trips and ferry tickets. Unlike other local hotels, it often has vacancies in August, since package groups arrive in September.

EATING & DRINKING

Betty's (☎ 22530 71421; 17 Noemvriou; mains €6-8) Look for the glossy-red overhanging balcony in this restored Turkish pasha's residence on the village's upper streets to find the best local cooking. Tasty *tyroptitakia*, savoury lamb *souvlaki* and baked eggplant with cheese are recommended; what really stand out, however, are unusual seafood specialities, such as Betty's spaghetti shrimp.

Captain's Table (☎ 22530 71241; mezedhes €3-5, mains €7-10; ☎ dinner) It might seem a bit gimmicky, but this fish-and-mezedhes place at the far end of the harbour has great seafood and unusual mezedhes, like the Ukrainian-inspired *adjuka* (spicy eggplant).

Molly's Bar (☎ 22530 71209; ☎ 6pm-late) With its thick-painted walls and blue stars, beaded curtains and bottled Guinness, this whimsical, British-run bar is always in ship-shape condition. Molly's caters to an older and international crowd, and is located on the waterfront's far eastern side.

Petra Πέτρα

pop 1246

Petra, 5km south of Mithymna (Molyvos), has become a popular, though low-key, resort. While its sandy beach and seafront square are attractive enough, bland souvenir shops outnumber Petra's few remaining traditional stone houses. Nevertheless, Petra does have some unique sights, such as the enormous rock for which the village is named that looms behind it. Atop it is the 18th-century **Panagia Glykofilousa** (Church of the Sweet-Kissing Virgin), accessible on foot up 114 rock-hewn steps. The village of **Petri**, to the east, has characteristic *old kafeneia* and features excellent views of Petra and the sea.

Petra has a post office, an OTE, a bank, medical facilities and bus connections. The refurbished Turkish mansion known as **Vareltzidaina's House** (admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Sun) is between the rock and the waterfront. Locals can provide directions.

For accommodation, excursions, boat and air tickets, visit the centrally located **Petra Tours** (☎ 22530 41390; petratours@otenet.gr).

Independent travellers should head straight to the **Women's Agricultural Tourism Cooperative** (☎ 22530 41238; womes@otenet.gr; s/d around €20), which works with Petra's 100 or so private rooms, ranging from studios to renovated farmhouses. The restaurant in which it's

COMRADES OF THE OLIVE

In the Lesvos of yesteryear there was no bachelor more eligible than an olive-soap purveyor; a woman working in an olive-oil factory, on the other hand, risked getting a 'reputation' for being in the company of strange men at a time when public appearances were meant to be restricted to the company of family.

These and other unexpected facts – such as that all of Lesvos' olive trees are of Turkish provenance, a great frost in 1850 having destroyed the trees existing until then – are presented with aplomb at the new **Museum of Industrial Olive Oil Production in Lesvos** (☎ 22530 32300; www.piop.gr; Agia Paraskevi; adult €3, student & child €1.50; 🕒 10am–6pm Wed–Mon). This remarkable museum, housed in a restored communal oil mill and stocked with vintage machinery, tells the history of Lesvos' olive-oil production in Greek and English, showing the vital role of local cooperation and the gruelling physical labour involved with the olive trade.

The museum is located in the dusty agricultural village of Agia Paraskevi, until the Greek Civil War the economic centre of inland Lesvos. The villagers' communist sympathies, however, led the right-wing government to 'punish' the village by relocating major public services to previously insignificant Kalloni. The new museum, funded by the Bank of Piraeus, goes a small way towards rectifying Agia Paraskevi's loss.

To reach the museum from the main Mytilini–Kalloni road, take the Agia Paraskevi turn-off for 3.5km; the museum is on the left. It's not terribly well signposted, so if you reach the town centre, you've gone too far.

based, **Syneterismos** (☎ 22530 41238; fax 22530 41309; mains €4–7), features an ever-changing array of specials. Portions are hearty and home-cooked, with friendly service.

WESTERN LESVOS

Spectacular, lonesome western Lesvos is the afterthought of massive, primeval volcanic eruptions that fossilised trees and all other living things, making it one of the world's most intriguing sites for today's prehistoric treasure hunters. The striking, bare landscape, only broken by craggy boulders and the occasional olive tree, is very different from the rest of Lesvos.

Byzantine spiritualists in their high monastic refuges were inspired by the barren, burnt moonscapes of the west, and well before them, a certain Sappho, the 7th-century BC poet who was dubbed 'the tenth muse' by Plato, reflected on the powerful simplicity of this environment in her taut verse. Such was the power of her literary seduction that even the usually level-headed ancient ruler Solon despaired that he too must be taught Sappho's song, because he wanted 'to learn it and die'.

However, it is the sensuous, erotic nature of Sappho's surviving poems, and the fact that she probably taught them to an inner circle of female companions, that made Sappho into a latter-day lesbian icon. Today the southwest coast of Skala Eresou is a haven

for lesbians from the world over, though its fine beaches and sunset cocktail bars have a more general clientele.

Although there are a few buses, it's best to rent a car to travel around Western Lesvos.

Kalloni to Sigri Καλλονή προς Σίγρι

After driving 34km west from Kalloni on the main road, the best place for a coffee or lunch break is **Andissa**, a jovial, rustic village kept cool by the two enormous plane trees that stand over its central stone *plateia*. Listen to the crickets and the banter of old-timers over a Greek coffee or frappe, while farmers hawk watermelons from the back of their trucks. Continue west for 9km and you'll find, at the top of a lone peak surrounded by volcanic plains, the Byzantine **Monastery of Ypsilou** (admission free; 🕒 7.30am–10pm). Founded in the 8th century, this storied place includes a flowering arched courtyard, a sumptuously decorated church, and a small but spectacular museum with gold and silver reliquaries, antique liturgical vestments, centuries-old icons and Byzantine manuscripts dating back to the 10th century. From the top of the stairs, there are magnificent views of the desolate ochre plains stretching out against the sea.

After the monastery, continue on the main road west for 4km, and turn left at a signposted road for another 4.9km to reach Lesvos' celebrated **petrified forest** (☎ 22530 54434;

www.petrifiedforest.gr; admission €2; 🕒 8am–5pm), which could be more honestly described as a petrified desert. The 20-million-year-old stumps that decorate this baking, shadeless valley are few and far between, though experts insist many more lurk under the ground, waiting to be dug up.

The best specimens have been relocated to the **Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest** (☎ 22530 54534; admission €5; 🕒 8.30am–8pm Mon–Thu & Sat–Sun, until 10pm Fri) in Sigri, a coastal village 7km to the west of the forest. This engaging modern museum manages to make old rocks and dusty fossils interesting, helped by interactive displays and a veritable motherlode of glittering amethyst, quartz and other semiprecious stones.

Tucked below the museum in a sheltered cove is sleepy **Sigri**, a fishing port whose fortunes have waned with the discontinuation of ferries. The village has beautiful sea views, especially at sunset, and there are idyllic, rarely visited stretches of sand just southwest. A good-quality dirt coastal road pointing south out of the village passes these beaches and leads, after 45 minutes of magnificent scenery, to Skala Eresou, western Lesvos' most popular destination.

Skala Eresou Σκάλα Ερεσού pop 1560

The key Lesvos experience for many is Skala Eresou, a bohemian beach town where the lesbian internationale meets to invoke the spirit of Sappho, much to the bemusement of local elders and much to the excitement of their teenaged grandsons. Its 2km-long beach is one of several exceptional nearby beaches, and is why (along with the fresh seafood and nightlife) the village is starting to attract a more mainstream clientele. Nevertheless, Skala Eresou remains a free-spirited place, especially lively during the Women Together festival each September.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The central square of Plateia Anthis and Evrithenous abuts the waterfront; the beach extends on both sides. Most restaurants and bars are found here, the latter on the eastern side of the *plateia*. Behind the *plateia* is the Church of Agias Andreas. Further west along Gyrrinnis are the post office, the OTE, shops, an ATM and Sap-

pho Travel. The village now has a **doctor** (☎ 22530 53947; 🕒 24hr).

The experienced **Sappho Travel** (☎ 22530 52140; www.sapphotravel.com) is Skala Eresou's main agency for travel information and tickets, accommodation, currency exchange and car rental. It organises sunset cruises for women and the increasingly popular **Women Together** festival. Held every September, this event has a worldwide reach, now attracting upwards of 400 women for two weeks of workshops, music, art, therapies and socialising. Book two months ahead if you want to stay in September.

SIGHTS

Eresou's **archaeological museum** contains Greek and Roman antiquities, but remained closed at the time of writing. It's near the exposed remains of the early Christian **Basilica of Agios Andreas**, which has partially intact 5th-century mosaics worthy of a peek.

SLEEPING

Skala Eresou has several reasonable domatia options, as well as some hotels that are steadily getting pricier. Some places that used to be women-only options have gone metrosexual, though two currently remain just for women.

Domatia Maria Pantermou (☎ 22530 53267; pantermou@in.gr; s/d/t €15/25/30; ♿) Dedicated budget travellers should find the lighthearted old couple Marianthi and Giorgios Pantermou, who operate these domatia on a back street across from the Mascot Hotel. While small and dated, rooms are clean and have balconies. The proprietors don't speak English, but their daughter (she who checketh the email) does.

Hotel Antiopi (☎ 22530 53311; s/d €30/50) A women-only hotel that benefitted when the Hotel Sappho went co-ed, the Antiopi has well-maintained but slightly cramped rooms that might strike one as either kitsch and cool or too cute.

Mascot Hotel (☎ 22530 52140; www.sapphotravel.com; s/d €30/60; ♿) The Mascot Hotel has taken up the mantle from the Hotel Sappho, fostering a bohemian air among its all-women clientele. A few blocks back from the beach, it features 10 snug modern rooms with balconies and a friendly staff. Book through Sappho Travel (☎ 22530 52140; www.sapphotravel.com).

Hotel Sappho (☎ 22530 53233; www.sapphohotel.com; s/d €40/60; ♿ 1 April–15 Oct; ♿) The Sappho was the village's first women-only hotel, but under new management has taken a more staid and ecumenical approach, the wild girl-on-girl parties now a thing of the past. The hotel's once-famous restaurant has devolved into a bar. While it has thus lost some street credibility among the lesbian set, the Sappho still has a prime waterfront setting, smartly appointed rooms and free internet for guests.

Hotel Galini (☎ 22530 53137/74; fax 22530 53155; s/d/tr €35/45/60) This family-run hotel about 100m from the beach on the eastern side of town has rooms that are clean and modern but, price considered, a bit uninspiring. There is a flower garden outside and the staff is helpful.

EATING

Skala Eresou's best restaurants and liveliest bars are above the beach. The ambience is enhanced by the sound of lapping waves. On clear days Chios emerges on the horizon.

Soulatso (☎ 22530 52078; mains €6–10) After choosing a waterfront table on Soulatso's beachfront patio, walk in to inspect the day's catches. Among them are usually red mullet, lobster and sea bream, and all will be expertly cooked and presented. Also recommended are the crab salad, stuffed *kalamari* (calamari/squid) and mussels with wine.

Eressos Palace (☎ 22530 5385; mains €6–10) Another place known for seafood, like fisherman's *souvlaki* and oil-marinated tuna, this solid choice on the west end of town also does great meat and vegetable dishes and purveys local Eressos cheese.

DRINKING

Skala Eresou's nightlife consists of several bars strung along the eastern waterfront. First, along the main *plateia*, is the **Tenth Muse** (☎ 22530 53287), an old favourite of females strong on fruit drinks, Haagen-Dazs ice cream and conviviality. The orange-lanterned **Parasol** (☎ 22530 52050), further down on the waterfront, whips up tropical cocktails that match its South-Seas décor. A nightclub more popular with young Greeks is the ever-so-slick **Breez** (☎ 22530 537108; www.breez-lesvos.gr). Finally, furthest down on the eastern waterfront, **Zorba the Buddha** (☎ 22530 53777) is a colourful, easygoing watering hole above the water, where revellers sometimes head for a midnight swim.

SOUTHERN LESVOS

Endless groves of olive trees mixed with pine roll from the flanks of Mt Olympus (968m), southern Lesvos' highest peak, right down to the sea, where the island's premier beaches lie. This is a hot, intensely agricultural place where the vital olive-oil, wine and ouzo industries overshadow tourism. Southern Lesvos has thus retained authenticity in its villages and solitude on its beaches, a state of affairs that should prevail well into the future.

The first large southern village is **Agiasos**. On the northern side of Mt Olympus, Agiasos is a picturesque, popular day-trip destination known for its local artisanry. Everything from handcrafted furniture to pottery is sold here. Agiasos' **Church of the Panagia Vrefokratousa** hosts a **Byzantine Museum** and **Popular Museum**.

The road south to the coast leads to **Plomari**, the centre of Lesvos' ouzo industry and an attractive seaside village in its own right, with a large, palm-lined *plateia* and waterfront tavernas. Most visitors stay, however, at the beach settlement of **Agios Isidoros**, 3km east. This beach isn't bad but **Tarti**, a bit further east, is nicer and less crowded. Continuing west from Plomari along the coast, **Melinda** is a peaceful fishing village with a beach, tavernas and domatia.

Melinda to Vatera *Μελίνα προς Βατερά*
Most people going from Plomari further west to Vatera, a laid-back village with a wonderful 8km stretch of sand, err on the side of caution by going the long way around, heading back north and then west and then south on the main roads. There's no need for that, however. The much more direct route, which passes through tranquil mountain villages, is eminently doable for the average car, saving time and also crossing stunning terrain; rolling hills are richly forested with olive trees and pines, and between steep gorges there are innumerable breathtaking views down to the sea.

Driving north from Melinda, you pass first through tiny **Paleohori**. So authentic and untouristed that no one even took the time to make it look 'traditional', Paleohori has very small streets and gentle elders who will peer over their thick glasses curiously at you from *kafeneia* in the village's miniature *plateia*. It also boasts, in the upper part of town, an old church much grander and more ornate than Paleohori would seem to need. It's usually open and, if you speak

Greek, the priest can provide information about its history.

Continuing north from Paleohori, there are sweeping views of the sea behind you and glimpses of even tinier villages nestled in forested mountains opposite. Take the road west to Akrassio, and then north to Ambeliko; even though there is a more direct western route, locals say it is safer to go to Ambeliko first and then, just before reaching the village, turn left on the signposted, good-quality dirt road pointing downwards to Kato Stavros. This road lasts 9km before reverting to asphalt, and passes through serene forests of pine and olive trees. The total driving time from Melinda to Vatera on this route is little over an hour.

For hikers, there are even more options for experiencing the natural beauty of southern Lesvos' 'olive trails', as they are called, which fan out on trails and old local roads from Plomari and Melinda. Those close to the latter include the **Melinda–Paleohori trail** (1.2km, 30 minutes), which follows the Selandas River for 200m before ascending to Paleohori, passing a spring with potable water along the way. The trail ends at one of the village's two olive presses. You can continue southwest to **Panagia Kryfti**, a cave church near a hot spring and the nearby Drota Beach, or take the **Paleohori–Rahidi trail** (1km, 30 minutes), which is paved with white stone and passes springs and vineyards. Rahidi, which got electricity only in 2001, has several charming old houses and a *kafeneio* in summer.

There are several other trails heading northeast from Melinda, to shady **Kournela** (1.8km, 40 minutes), and from there to **Milos** (800m, 20 minutes), where there's an old flour mill. Milos can also be reached directly from Melinda (2km, one hour) on a trail that hugs the river and passes ruined olive mills, one spring and two bridges, as well as orange and mandarin trees. From Milos, follow the river northeast to **Amaxo** (1.75km, one hour) and be treated to refreshing mountain-spring water in plane, poplar and pine forests.

There are several other olive trails, and you could hike directly from Melinda to Vatera via some of them; consult the **EOT** (☎ 22510 42511; Aristarhou 6; ♿ 9am–1pm Mon–Fri) in Mytilini town or a travel agency to get precise details.

Vatera & Polyhnitos

Βατερά προς Πολυχνίτο
Lesvos' most celebrated beach, Vatera (*vah-ter-ah*), stretches for over 8km along the

tranquil southern coast. That said, one would immediately assume it to be long built up and packaged out; astonishingly, Vatera's tourism is very low-key, with only a few small hotels and domatia operating, and even fewer bars. Sandy, serene Vatera is thus a perfect destination for families, couples, or anyone looking to get away from it all.

Vatera has plenty of history. On its western edge, at Cape Agios Fokas, are the ruins of an ancient **Temple of Dionysos**, occupying a prime position near a headland overlooking the sea. In the cove between the beach and the cape, evidence has been found indicating ancient armies once camped there; indeed, historians believe this is the place Homer was referring to in the *Iliad* as the resting point for Greek armies besieging Troy. Legend also has it that the nearby village of Vrissa was named after a Trojan woman, Vrysseida, who died after being contested by two of the victorious Greek fighters. To this day old women and even the occasional baby girl with the name Vrysseida can be found here; the name is not given anywhere else.

Vatera's most remote history, however, is what has predominantly attracted international attention. Fossils dating back 5.5 million years have been found behind the village, including remains of a tortoise as big as a Volkswagen Bug and fossils of a gigantic horse and gazelle. A small **Museum of Natural History** (☎ 22520 61890; admission €1; ♿ 9.30am–7.30pm), located in Vryssa's old schoolhouse houses these and other significant remains. Ongoing excavations carried out by the University of Athens and the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands mean that the most exciting finds may still be to come.

The agricultural village of **Polyhnitos**, about 10km north of Vatera on the main road leading back to Mytilini town, is unremarkable except for its nearby **hot springs**. There are two, one just to the southeast and the other 5km north, outside Lisvorio village. The former, known as the **Polyhnitos Spa** (☎ 22520 41449; fax 22520 42678; admission €3; ♿ 7am–12pm & 3–8pm) is in a pretty, renovated Byzantine building, and has some of the hottest temperatures of any baths in Europe, at 87.6°C. Rheumatism, arthritis, skin diseases and gynaecological problems are treated here.

The latter, the **Lisvorio Spa** (☎ 22530 71245; admission €3; ♿ 8am–1pm & 3–8pm) consists of two quaint little baths situated around a

stream, surrounded by foliage. The baths are unmarked, so ask around for directions; the buildings are in a state of disrepair, but bathing is unaffected, and the temperature and water properties are similar to those at Polyhnitos.

Sleeping & Eating

Our pick **Hotel Vatera Beach** (☎ 22520 61212; www.vaterabeach.com; s/d €55/90; ♿) While there are plenty of average domatia and a few overpriced hotels in southern Lesvos, there is only one Vatera Beach. This peaceful, family-run beachfront hotel regards its guests, many of whom come back year after year, as dear old friends. The congenial George and Barbara Ballis aim to ensure a relaxing holiday – whether for couples, families or single travellers – by providing for common needs; free newspapers in several languages, an ‘internet corner’ with computers and friendly service. The excellent Vatera Beach Restaurant, sought out by nonguests too, gets most of its ingredients from the owners’ organic farm.

LIMNOS ΛΙΜΝΟΣ

pop 15,224 / area 482 sq km

A pleasant surprise awaits those who make the effort to reach balmy Limnos, seemingly all by itself in the north Aegean, accompanied only by its satellite island of Agios Efstratios. In successfully balancing tradition and tourism, Limnos has done the seemingly impossible. Its capital, Myrina, has a classic Greek fishing harbour feel, and is crowned by a grand Genoese castle. In summer the beautiful people fill Myrina’s cozy streets, lined with sophisticated shops and stately neoclassical mansions, and flock to the sandy beaches that surround it, where happening café-bars open late into the night.

Limnos is not huge, but it does offer some variety. Spectacular flocks of flamingos visit its placid eastern lakes, while the austere central plain is filled with wildflowers in spring and autumn. Pristine sandy beaches, steep cliffs and sea caves line the coasts. Since package tourism is minimal, visitors are treated with friendly curiosity in the villages. Those who do arrive on an organised trip usually do so for windsurfing or adventure sports – thus providing some competition to the fearless

fellows in the Hellenic Air Force, which has its central command here.

Limnos is indeed in an ideal position for monitoring the Straits of the Dardanelles leading into Istanbul, and for this reason it played the key role in the failed Gallipoli campaign in WW1. Near the eastern port of Moudros, where the Allied ships were based, is a military cemetery for fallen Commonwealth soldiers, which you can visit today.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There is a daily flight to Limnos from Athens (from €66, one hour), six flights weekly from Thessaloniki (€65, 45 minutes) and three weekly to Lesvos (€41, 35 minutes). **Olympic Airlines** (☎ 22540 22214; www.olympicairlines.com; Nikolou Garoufalidou) is opposite Hotel Paris in Myrina.

The airport is 22km east of Myrina; taxi cost about €16.

EXCURSION BOAT

Day trip to the nearby island of Agios Efstratios with the *Aeolis* ferry every Sunday, leaving at 8am and returning at 5pm. Tickets cost €6.60/15 one way/return and are sold at **Myrina Tourist & Travel Agency** (☎ 22540 22460; mirina@lim.forthnet.gr) on Myrina waterfront.

FERRY

SAOS Ferries (☎ 22540 29571; on the port) operates four ferries weekly to Lavrio (€27.70, 13 hours) and once weekly to Paralia Kymis on Evia (€22.50, six hours). There are six ferries weekly from Limnos to Kavala (€17, five hours).

SAOS also runs three to four boats weekly to Chios (€22, 10½ hours), Samos (€25, 13½ hours) and Icaria (€30, 15 hours) via Lesvos. There are three boats weekly to Thessaloniki (€25, eight hours) and one or two to Alexandroupoli (€20, five hours) via Samothraki (€15, three hours). Note some of these are faster boats and thus more expensive.

Two other companies, Agoudimos and NEL Lines, run ferries; buy tickets at **Pravlis Travel** (☎ 22540 22471; pravlis@lim.forthnet.gr; Parasidis 15). Cumulatively, they run one weekly boat to Piraeus (€30, nine hours), twice-weekly ferries to Thessaloniki (€22.10, 8½ hours), one weekly boat to Alexandroupoli (€14, 4½ hours) and two weekly boats to Chios (€21.60, 9½ hours) via Lesvos (€18.40, six hours);

one of these continues on to Samos (€27, 13 hours). One weekly ferry goes to Rhodes (€38, 24½ hours) via Kalymnos (€33.60, 17 hours) and Kos (€29.50, 18¼ hours).

Agios Efstratios is served five times weekly by the local ferry *Aiolis* (one way/return €6.60/15, two hours). Buy tickets at **Myrina Tourist & Travel Agency** (☎ 22540 22460; mirina@lim.forthnet.gr).

Getting Around

BUS

Limnos’ bus service has one diabolical purpose: to bring villagers to town for their morning shopping and to get them home by lunch. Going and returning by bus in the same day is only possible to four destinations, by no means the most interesting ones either. Call or visit the **bus station** (☎ 22540 22464; Plateia Eleftheriou Venizelou), which displays schedules in the window and has printed copies you can take.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

In Myrina cars and jeeps can be rented from **Myrina Rent-a-Car** (☎ 22540 24476; fax 22540 22484; Kyda-Karatza), near the waterfront. Prices cost €30

to €45 for a small car or jeep. There are several motorcycle-rental outlets on Kyda-Karatza.

TAXI

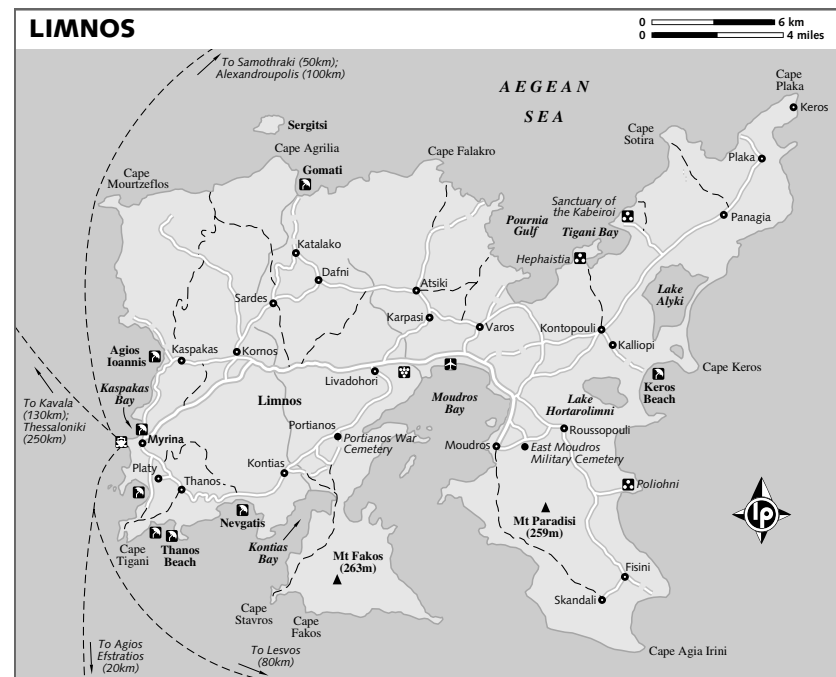
A **taxi rank** (☎ 22540 23033) is on Myrina’s central square.

MYRINA MYPINA

pop 5107

Limnos’ striking capital is at once grandiose, with its volcanic-rock backdrop and craggy Genoese castle, and serene, with its harbour full of colourful little fishing boats, and old fishermen sipping Greek coffee while unfolding their nets. Beyond the castle is a lovely sandy beach, while another, less windy one lies beyond that.

In summer especially, Myrina is a warm and lively town, full of shops selling traditional foods and local muscat, as well as clothing and trendy accoutrements for women in its bustling *agora*. Its whitewashed stone houses, old-fashioned barber shops and *kafeneia*, crumbling neoclassical mansions and wood-balconied homes all create a relaxed feel.



At night the town is enlivened by garrulous Greeks at Myrina's tasty fish tavernas and the music from stylish beachfront bars. At the same time, however, the castle's overgrown hill is inhabited by scores of fleet-footed deer who dart around at night; in winter, locals say, the deer even come down to wander through the *agora* – presumably, to do their shopping.

Orientation

From the end of the quay turn right onto Plateia Iliia Iliou. Continue along the waterfront, passing Hotel Lemnos and the town hall. Turn left after the derelict Hotel Aktaion, then immediately veer half-left onto the main thoroughfare Kyda-Karatza to reach Myrina's central square. Continue and you will come to Plateia Eleftheriou Venizelou and the bus station.

Information

The National Bank of Greece, on the central square, has an ATM. There's a small tourist information kiosk on the quay during summer.

Excite-Net (☎ 22540 25525; per hr €1.50; 🕒 24hr) Prominently advertised internet access, in a café on the waterfront.

Hristos A Kazolis Fotografos-Ekdotis (☎ 22540 25445) Well-stocked photography shop on the upper end of Kyda-Karatza; sells *Deeds of Men*, a Greek-English book on now-defunct traditional crafts in Limnos, accompanied by a superb collection of evocative photographs.

Myrina Rent a Car (☎ 22540 24476; fax 22540 22484; Kyda-Karatza) Near the waterfront.

Myrina Tourist & Travel Agency (☎ 22540 22460; mirina@lim.forthnet.gr) Sells ferry tickets to Agios Efstratios; on the waterfront.

Police station (☎ 22540 22201; Nikolaou Garoufallidou) At the far end of the street, on the right coming from Kyda-Karatza.

Port police (☎ 22540 22225) On the waterfront near the quay.

Post office (Nikolaou Garoufallidou)

Pravlis Travel (☎ 22540 22471; pravlis@lim.forthnet.gr; Parasidi 15) Sells Agoudimos and NEL Lines ferry tickets.

SAOS Ferries (☎ 22540 29571) Sells ferry tickets from a small compartment on the castle side of the waterfront.

Theodoros Petrides Travel Agency (☎ 22540 22039; www.petridestravel.gr; Kyda-Karatza 116)

Sights & Activities

Myrina's **castle** stands on a headland over the town that divides it from the beach on the

other side. Climb up for magnificent views over the sea to Mt Athos. As you walk from the harbour, take the first side street to the left by an old Turkish fountain. A sign here points you to the castle. At night, sitting in front of the church on the northeastern side of the castle combines great views of the café lights down below and, if you're lucky, quick glimpses of bounding deer in the darkness to the left.

Myrina has two good local beaches, the wide and sandy **Rea Maditos**, and a superior swath of sand, **Romeikos Gialos**, which is beyond the harbour; it's accessible by taking any left from Kyda-Karatza as you're walking inland. Further on, it becomes **Riha Nera** (shallow water), named for its gently shelving, child-friendly beach. There is nightlife here, too.

Myrina's **archaeological museum** (admission €2; 🕒 9am-3pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a neoclassical mansion overlooking Romeikos Gialos beach, and contains finds from all the three sites on Limnos – Poliohni, Sanctuary of the Kabeiroi and Hephaistia – exhibited in chronological order.

Tours

Theodoros Petrides Travel Agency (☎ 22540 22039; www.petridestravel.gr; 🕒 Jun-Sep) organises round-the-island boat trips (€15), which include stops for swimming and lunch.

Sleeping

Hotel Lemnos (☎ 22540 22153; fax 22540 23329; s/d €35/45; 🕒) Right on the harbour, the Lemnos has friendly staff and modern, spacious rooms. From the balconies, there are views of the waterfront or castle.

Hotel Filokittis (☎/fax 22540 23344; Ethnikis Andistasis 14; s/d €40/50; 🕒) This welcoming hotel has airy, well-equipped rooms just inland of Myrina's second beach of Riha Nera. Follow Maroulas (the continuation of Kyda-Karatza) and then Ethnikis Andistasis; the hotel is located above the quite fine restaurant of the same name.

Apollo Pavilion (☎/fax 22540 23712; www.apollopavilion.com; d studios incl breakfast €50; 🕒) Tucked behind the port in a neoclassical house, the Apollo Pavillion offers large rooms with kitchenette and balcony, and can fill up; book ahead in summer. Walk along Nikolaou Garoufallidou from Kyda-Karatza and the sign is 150m along on the right.

To Arhontiko (☎ 22540 29800; cnr Sahtouri & Filellinon; s/d/tr €50/60/70; 🕒) This restored mansion, built originally in 1814, has lovely boutique rooms with simple charm, and helpful, friendly staff. It's located on a quiet alley around the corner from the main shopping street, and one street back from the beach.

Eating & Drinking

Our pick: Ouzeri To 11 (☎ 22540 22635; Plateia KTEL; seafood mezedhes €4.50-6) This unassuming little *ouzerie* by the bus depot is actually Myrina's seafood emporium. From mussels with garlic and venus clams (*kydonia*) to limpets, sea urchins, crayfish and more, 'To *En-dheka*' (as it's pronounced) serves all the strange stuff, along with plenty of ouzo to make you forget what you're eating.

O Platanos Taverna (☎ 22540 22070; mains from €5) *Mayirefta* with an emphasis on meats are the order of business at this local institution under a giant plane tree, halfway along Kyda-Karatza. The menu is not particularly inventive, however.

Myrina's nightlife is centred around the bars above Romeikos Gialos beach. A very popular one in summer, Karagiozis, on a leafy terrace near the sea, serves many kinds of cocktails and beers until late.

WESTERN LIMNOS

Driving north of Myrina, take the road left after **Kaspakas** village to the above-average beach at **Agios Ioannis**. The settlement has a few tavernas and beach houses, but the most unique thing here is at the end of the beach, where the aptly named **Rock Café** is set nicely beneath a large overhanging volcanic slab.

After Kaspakas, drive east and turn left at **Kornos**, and follow the road northwards to the remote beach at **Gomati** on the north coast; a good dirt road gets there from **Katalako**.

Alternatively, drive east from Kaspakas and keep going past Kornos, turning south only at **Livadohori**. This road passes barren, tawny hills as well as modest farmlands. Further south along the coast road is **Kontias**; this fairly prosaic, plastered old village has become a hot commodity for European property hunters, though it's not exactly clear why. Below Kontias the road swings southwest back to Myrina, on the way passing by two of Limnos' nicest and most popular beaches, **Nevgatis** and **Thanos**. Although they can get crowded, these beaches

are truly idyllic and only a 10-minute drive from Myrina.

CENTRAL LIMNOS

The flat plateaus of central Limnos are dotted with wheat fields, small vineyards and sheep, as well as a major airbase of the Greek Air Force. Limnos' second-largest town, **Moudros**, is positioned on the eastern side of the muddy bay of the same name, famous for its role in WWI but, despite having a few hotels and tavernas, not for tourism. The **East Moudros Military Cemetery**, with the graves of Commonwealth soldiers from the Gallipoli campaign, is 1km east of Moudros on the road to Roussopouli. This cemetery, with its metal plaque that gives a short history of the Gallipoli campaign, and a second Commonwealth cemetery, **Portianos War Cemetery** (6km south of Livadohori on the road to Thanos beach and Myrina), are the sombre attractions here. Moudros, occupied by Royal Marines in February 1915, was the principal base for the ill-fated campaign.

EASTERN LIMNOS

Historical remnants and remote beaches are the drawcards for visitors to eastern Limnos. Its three **archaeological sites** (admission free; 🕒 8am-7pm) include four ancient settlements at **Poliohni** on the southeast coast, the most significant being a pre-Mycenaean city that predated Troy VI (1800-1275 BC). The site is well presented, but remains are few.

The second site, the **Sanctuary of the Kabeiroi** (Ta Kaviria), lies on remote Tigani Bay in northeastern Limnos. The worship of the Kabeiroi gods here actually predates that of Samothraki (see p637), more famous for this mystery cult. The major site, a **Hellenistic sanctuary**, has 11 columns. Nearby is the legendary **Cave of Philoctetes**, where that hero of the Trojan War was abandoned while his gangrenous, snake-bitten leg healed. A path from the site leads to the sea cave; there's also a hidden and narrow unmarked entrance to the left just past the main entrance.

To reach the sanctuary, take the left-hand turn-off after the village of **Kontopouli** for 5km; from Kontopouli, you can also follow a dirt road to the third site, **Hephaistia** (Ta Ifestia), once Limnos' most important city. It's where Hephaestus, god of fire and metallurgy, was hurled down from Mt Olympus by Zeus. Little remains, however, other than low walls and a partially excavated theatre.

Limnos' northeastern tip has some rustic, rarely visited villages, and a deserted beach at **Keros** popular with windsurfers. Flocks of flamingos sometimes strut on shallow **Lake Alyki**. From Cape Plaka, at the northeastern tip of Limnos, you can see the islands of Samothraki, and Imvros (Gökçeada) in Turkey. These three islands have historically been considered to form a strategic triangle for the defense of İstanbul (Constantinople); this was Turkey's case for clinging to Imvros in 1923, even after Greece had won back most of its other islands a decade earlier.

AGIOS EFSTRATIOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΕΥΣΤΡΑΤΙΟΣ

pop 371

Stranded on its own in the middle of the Aegean, Agios Efstratios is too big to be a dependency of Limnos but too small to be anything more. Nevertheless, though the island is sparsely populated and the architecture nothing spectacular – an effect of a 1968 earthquake that destroyed the island's old buildings – Ai-Stratis, as locals call it, does see a fair number of curious visitors. It has rooms, tavernas and modest nightlife, as well as some very fine beaches, some accessible only by boat.

Many dissidents and suspect communists were exiled here before and after WWII, among them the composer Mikis Theodorakis and poets Kostas Varnalis and Giannis Ritsos.

Sights & Activities

BEACHES

The **village beach** has dark volcanic sand and warm waters. A 90-minute walk northeast will bring you to **Alonitsi Beach**, a long, idyllic strand with intriguing facing islets offshore. To get there, take the little track from the northeast side of the village, starting by a small bridge, and when it splits, keep to the right. **Lidario**, a beach on the west side, can be reached on foot, but with difficulty. Try to arrange a boat trip locally to this and other hard-to-reach beaches, or else wander off for peaceful hill walks.

Sleeping & Eating

You can book rooms in Limnos through **Myrina Tourist & Travel Agency** (☎ 22540 22460;

mirina@lim.forthnet.gr) or **Theodoros Petrides Travel Agency** (☎ 22540 22039; www.petridestravel.gr; Kydakaratzá 116), or else look out for domatia once you arrive; only in the height of summer might things ever be crowded.

There are a few tavernas, with generally reasonably priced fare and the seafood, of course, is excellent and fresh.

Getting There & Away

There are five services weekly to Limnos (€10, two hours) and one weekly to Kavala (€15.50, 6¾ hours). The local ferry *Aiolis* goes daily from Limnos in summer. Tickets cost €6.60/15 one way/return; buy at **Myrina Tourist & Travel Agency** (☎ 22540 22460; mirina@lim.forthnet.gr) in Myrina. Bad weather can cause unpredictable cancellations and delays to the schedule.

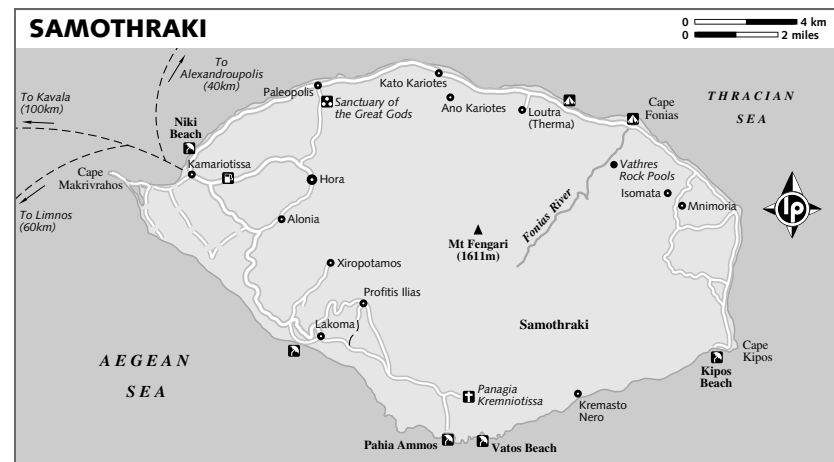
SAMOTHRAKI ΣΑΜΟΘΡΑΚΗ

pop 2723 / area 176 sq km

For well over a thousand years, Samothraki's Sanctuary of the Great Gods was the site of a mystery religion respected and endowed by the Mediterranean world's greatest rulers. When you approach it on the ferry, the island does indeed seem to be holding many secrets within a hulking mass capped by mighty Mt Fengari (1611m), the Aegean's loftiest peak, from where Homer recounts that Poseidon, god of the sea, watched the Trojan War unfold.

Samothraki's greatness, however, does not just lie in the past. It offers some of the best – though still largely unexplored – hiking opportunities in Greece, with valleys filled with massive gnarled oak and plane trees, and forests redolent of olive and pine. There are barren and craggy peaks in the centre of the island, unvisited sandy beaches in the south and, in the northeast, a vertiginous series of lush waterfalls that plunge into deep, icy pools. The opposite kind of catharsis is found further west along the coast, with the therapeutic hot baths of Loutra (Therma).

Samothraki has always attracted an alternative, environmentally aware crowd, and in summer the proliferation of safari hats, dreadlocks and Hindu symbols add to the exotic, jungle vibe. The island's famous elec-



tronic and world music festivals have also long drawn a hip young crowd for what is perhaps the modern equivalent of the ancient spiritual rites brought to the island by the Thracians around 1000 BC.

Historical sites of more recent creation, such as the Byzantine tower at Cape Foniai and the ruined Genoese castle that crowns the island's inland capital, Hora, will also appeal to the aesthetically inclined. Set amid stark cliffs, this very photogenic village is filled with narrow, flowering streets and boasts one of the best sweets shops in all of Greece.

Samothraki's remoteness and relatively poor transport links, however, mean that it's often left off the average island-hopping itinerary – a shame, considering that Samothraki is one of the coolest of all Greek islands, one reserved for the true initiates.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

Lacking an airport, Samothraki is accessible only by ferry, from Limnos and the mainland ports of Kavala and Alexandroupoli.

During the summer months the Samothraki-based SAOS Ferries goes twice daily to Alexandroupoli (€11, two hours). There are two weekly ferries to Kavala (€14.50, four hours) and two to Limnos (€10.50, three hours). The Kavala run is during summer only. Buy tickets at **Niki Tours** (☎ 25510 41465; niki_tours@hotmail.com) in Kamariotissa. Hydrofoils theoretically exist, but services change frequently.

Getting Around

BUS

In summer 10 buses daily go from Kamariotissa to Hora (€1) and eight to Loutra (Therma; €2) via Paleopolis (€1). Some of the Loutra buses continue to the two camping grounds. Five buses daily serve Profitis Ilias (€2) via Alonia and Lakoma.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

On Kamariotissa's waterfront, opposite the buses, **X Rentals** (☎ 25510 42272) rents cars and small jeeps, as does **Kyrkos Rent a Car** (☎ 25510 41620, 6972839231). **Rent A Motor Bike** (☎ 25510 41057), opposite the quay, rents motorcycles and scooters.

EXCURSION BOAT

In summer the tour boat *Samothraki* circles the island (€17), departing from Loutra (Therma) at 11am and returning by 6.30pm. The boat hugs the coast, passing sites like the Byzantine castle of Foniai, the rock formations of Panias and Kremasto waterfall, before stopping at 1pm for four hours of swimming and sunbathing at Vatos Beach. A snack bar operates throughout the trip. For more information, ask at the taverna Petrinos Kipos in Kamariotissa or call the boat operator (☎ 25510 42266).

TAXI

Taxis on Samothraki are quick and, with three or more people, can be cheaper than the bus. The most popular destinations from Kamari-

otissa are: Hora (€4.50), Pahlia Ammos (€15), Profitis Ilias (€7.50), Sanctuary of the Great Gods (€4.50), Loutra (Therma; €7.50), first camping ground (€8.50), second camping ground (€9.50), Fonias River (€10.50), and Kipos Beach (€17).

For a taxi, call the English- and German-speaking company **Petros Glinias** (☎ 6972883501) or other Kamariotissa **taxi companies** (☎ 25510 41733, 25510 41341, 25510 41077).

KAMARIOTISSA ΚΑΜΑΡΙΩΤΙΣΣΑ

pop 963

Samothraki's port, largest town and transport hub is Kamariotissa, which has some services and a nearby pebble beach with beach bars and decent swimming. Although most people don't sleep here, Kamariotissa is roughly equidistant from Samothraki's more famous attractions, and everyone passes through it. While not the most exciting destination, Kamariotissa is hardly the least appealing of Greek island ports and is filled with flowers and good fish tavernas.

Orientation & Information

Turn left when disembarking from the ferry and you will see a tourist information kiosk after 50m, on the port side of the road running parallel to the water. Buses for the rest of the island are just behind this kiosk further east on the waterfront. Across the road are the majority of the town's tavernas, travel and car- and motorcycle-rental agencies, and two ATMs. Follow the waterfront further east and after 100m begins the town beach.

Café Aktaion (☎ 25510 41056; per hr €4) Internet café at the west end of the harbour.

Niki Tours (☎ 25510 41465; fax 25510 41304; niki_tours@hotmail.com) A very helpful starting point for any visit to Samothraki; across the street from the buses.

Port police (☎ 25510 41305) East along the waterfront.

www.samothraki.com General information about Samothraki, including boat schedules.

Activities

Haris Hatzigiannakoudis at **Niki Tours** (☎ 25510 41465; niki_tours@hotmail.com) runs a **Capoeira Camp** (a Brazilian martial art/dance) with Brazilian master Lua Rasta annually in late June, and can organise **hiking safaris** to Mt Fengari. As many of the hiking trails in Samothraki's lush interior are poorly marked or unmarked completely, and since the island has no official mountaineering guide, Haris is the man

to see for those interested in serious hiking on Samothraki.

Festivals & Events

Although disapproving local authorities pulled the plug on Samothraki's famous world music festival a couple of years ago, organisers have pledged to bring it back in its previous incarnation, as an electronic music festival. When it's held, the three-day event takes place at the island's camping grounds. Since at the time of writing details were still undecided, it's best to get updates from Haris Hatzigiannakoudis at **Niki Tours** (☎ 25510 41465; niki_tours@hotmail.com).

Sleeping

Rooms of varying quality are advertised throughout Kamariotissa; the port-side tourist information kiosk or **Niki Tours** (☎ 25510 41465; niki_tours@hotmail.com) can also arrange accommodation.

Niki Beach Hotel (☎ 25510 41545; fax 25510 41461; s/d €40/60) A good bet for those who want to stay in Kamariotissa, this spacious hotel with large, modern rooms has a lovely garden and is fronted by poplar trees. Just opposite is the town beach of the same name.

Hotel Aeolos (☎ 25510 41595; fax 25510 41810; s/d incl breakfast €60/70; ♿ ♿) Up behind Niki Beach Hotel, the Aeolos stands on a hill overlooking the sea and has comfortable rooms. Front rooms overlook the large swimming pool and garden, while the back ones have views of Mt Fengari.

Eating

Klimitaria Restaurant (☎ 25510 41535; mains from €5.50) This eatery at the eastern end of the waterfront serves an unusual speciality called *gianiotiko*, which is an oven-baked dish of diced pork, potatoes, egg and more, as well as the usual taverna fare.

I Synantisi (☎ 25510 41308; fish €4.50-10) For fresh fish at good prices, head to this hard-working outdoor *ouzerie* on the central waterfront. Check out the daily catch, preserved on ice inside. The *melanouri* (saddled bream), not as small as it looks, and a Greek salad make for a tasty lunch.

HORA ΧΩΡΑ

Set within a natural fortress of two sheer cliffs, and with a sweeping view of the sea, Hora (also called Samothraki) was the obvious choice for

the island's capital. Indeed, its northwestern flank is watched over by a ruined Byzantine castle, thought to date from the 10th century but most often associated with Palamidi Gattilusi, a 15th-century Genoese lord who married into the Palaeologos family – the last imperial dynasty of Byzantium.

With its curving cobbled streets wreathed in flowers and colourful, crumbling traditional houses topped by terracotta roofs, Hora is a perfect place for ambling and enjoying a leisurely lunch or coffee. The village's great views and constant interplay of angles, shadows and colour make it great for photographers, and in summer there is eclectic nightlife to be found in Hora's small streets and roof bars.

Orientation & Information

Buses and taxis stop in a central square below the village. Walk straight upwards along the street, following the signs for the *kastró* (castle). This main street houses the OTE, Agricultural Bank and post office. The **police station** (☎ 25510 41203) is far up in Gattilusi's castle. Following the main street upwards brings you past several cafés and tavernas and, on the right, a small fountain with mountain water for filling your drink bottle.

Sleeping

There is no hotel in Hora; ask around for *domatia*. Midway up the main street, **Kyra Despina** (☎ 6974980263; s/d €40/50), who speaks some English, has fan-only self-catering studios with sweeping views, which sleep two to four people.

Eating & Drinking

Our pick **O Lefkos Pyrgos** (☎ 25510 41601; desserts €4-6; ☎ 9am-3am Jul-Aug) One of the best sweet shops anywhere, the summer-only Lefkos Pyrgos is the culinary laboratory of master desserts inventor Georgios Stergiou and wife Dafni. Georgios insists on only using all-natural ingredients, without preservatives or artificial flavourings. His concoctions are both extraordinarily refreshing (try the lemonade sweetened with honey and cinnamon on a hot summer's day) and unique, like Greek yogurt flavoured with bitter almond. Exotic teas, coffees and mixed drinks are also served. Some have amusing names like *The Thief of The Louvre* (vanilla ice cream and Grand Marnier), or the infamous *Tar and Feather* (*Pissa kai Poupoula*) – an indulgent, soufflé-

type cake oozing with liquid chocolate and topped with caramelised almond and vanilla ice cream. Occasional live music nights range from experimental jazz to classical.

Café-Ouzeri 1900 (☎ 25510 41224; mains €5-8) This relaxing taverna set under a shady trellis just before the fountain on the left offers friendly service and great views of the village's red rooftops, castle and sea – and even better food. Try the *spetsofai* (stewed green peppers, tomatoes and sausage in an earthen pot), rice with seafood, or *tzigerosarmades* (goat flavoured with onion, dill and spearmint). The large, colourful menu, printed to look like a newspaper, is a take-home memento.

Meltemi (☎ 25510 41071; ☎ 8am-late) Continue higher up in Hora and take the side street to the left, opposite the fountain, to find this cool bar with great views; it has a popular roof garden that rocks in summer.

SANCTUARY OF THE GREAT GODS ΤΟ ΙΕΡΟ ΤΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ

Beside the coastal village of Paleopolis, 6km northeast of Kamariotissa, is the **Sanctuary of the Great Gods** (admission €3, free Sun 1 Nov-31 Mar & public holidays; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Tue-Sun). The mysterious cult of the Great Gods, of even greater antiquity than the Olympian gods, was brought to Samothraki by the Thracians around 1000 BC. By the 5th century BC luminaries of the ancient world were coming for initiation into its rites, still largely unknown. The sanctuary was patronised by great rulers, such as Egyptian Queen Arsinoe and Philip II of Macedon. Samothraki's sacred function remained until paganism was forbidden in the 4th century AD.

The principal Thracian deity, the Great Mother (Alceros Cybele), was worshipped as a fertility goddess and, when the original Thracian religion became integrated with the state religion, was merged with the Olympian female deities Demeter, Aphrodite and Hecate. The last of these was a mysterious goddess associated with darkness, the underworld and witchcraft. Other deities worshipped at Samothraki's temple were the Great Mother's consort, the virile young Kadmilos (god of the phallus), later integrated with the Olympian god Hermes and the demonic Kabeiroi twins, Dardanos and Aeton, later integrated with Castor and Pollux (the Dioscuri), the twin sons of Zeus and Leda. These twins were invoked by mariners to protect them

against the perils of the sea. Samothraki's Great Gods were venerated for their immense power; in comparison, the bickering Olympian gods were frivolous and fickle, almost comic characters.

Today we know little about how the Great Gods were worshipped; initiates who revealed the rites were punished by death. The archaeological evidence, however, suggests that two initiations, a lower and a higher, were held. In the first, the Great Gods were invoked to grant the initiate a spiritual rebirth; in the second, the candidate was absolved of transgressions. All were allowed to participate.

The site's most celebrated relic, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (now in the Louvre in Paris), was found by Champoiseau, the French consul, at Adrianople (present-day Edirne in Turkey) in 1863. Subsequent excavations were sporadic until just before WWII, when Karl Lehmann and Phyllis Williams Lehmann of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, directed an organised dig.

Exploring the Site

The Sanctuary of the Great Gods' site is extensive but well labelled. After entering, take the left-hand path to the rectangular **anakoron**. At its southern end was a **sacristy**, the antechamber where white-gowned candidates assembled before going to the *anakoron*'s main room for their first (lower) initiation. One by one, each initiate would then enter the small inner temple at the northern end of the building, where a priest would disclose the meanings of the ceremony's symbols. Afterwards the initiates received a sort of initiation certificate back in the sacristy.

Sacrifices took place in the **arsinoein**, southwest of the *anakoron*. Once a grand cylindrical structure, it was built in 289 BC as a gift to the Great Gods from the Egyptian queen Arsinoe. Southeast of it stands the **sacred rock**, the site's original altar.

Following the initiations, a celebratory feast was held, probably in the **temenos** to the south of the *arsinoein*, a gift from Philip II of Macedon. Adjacent is the prominent Doric **hieron**, the sanctuary's most photographed ruin, with five of its columns reassembled. Initiates received their second (higher) initiation here.

Opposite the *hieron* stand remnants of a **theatre**. Nearby, a path ascends to the **Nike monument** where once stood the magnificent

Winged Victory of Samothrace, a gift from Demetrius Poliorketes (the 'besieger of cities') to the Kabeiroi for helping him defeat Ptolemy II in battle. The ruins of a massive **stoa**, a two-aisled portico where pilgrims to the sanctuary sheltered, lie to the northwest. Initiates' names were recorded on its walls. Ruins of the **medieval fortress** lie to the north of the stoa.

A good site map is located on the path east from the Nike monument; the path continues to the southern **necropolis**, Samothraki's most important ancient cemetery, used from the Bronze Age to early Roman times. North of the cemetery once stood the sanctuary's elaborate Ionic entrance, the **propylon**, a gift from Ptolemy II.

MUSEUM

The admission cost includes the site's well-labelled **museum** (☎ 25510 41474; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun). Exhibits include terracotta figurines, vases, jewellery and a plaster cast of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*.

AROUND SAMOTHRAKI

Loutra (Therma) Λουτρά (Θερμά) Loutra (interchangeably called Therma) is 14km east of Kamariotissa and near the coast. It's the most popular village for accommodation on Samothraki, a relaxing village of plane and horse chestnut trees, dense greenery and gurgling creeks. At night young people staying in local domatia or the nearby camping grounds congregate in its café and there is a laid-back feel to the place.

The village's synonymous names refer to its therapeutic, mineral-rich springs; a dip in the **thermal bath** (☎ 25510 98229; admission €3; 🕒 7-10.45am & 4-7.45pm Jun-Sep) is said to cure everything from skin problems and liver ailments to infertility. The prominent white building by the bus stop houses the official bath; however, bathing for free can be done at another indoor bath, 50m up the road to the right of the main one, and at two small outdoor baths another 20m up the hill.

SLEEPING & EATING

Samothraki's two popular camping grounds are both on the beach east of Loutra. They are both called 'Multilary Camping' (no, they don't mean 'Military') and are quite similar. If you come before the camping grounds are officially open, you can usually stay for free.

Multilary Camping I (Camping Plateia; ☎ 25510 41784; sites per adult/tent €3/3; 🕒 Jun-Aug) A shady, laid-back place on the left 2km beyond Loutra.

Multilary Camping II (☎ 25510 41491; sites per adult/tent €3/3; 🕒 Jun-Aug) A little further past Multilary Camping I, with a minimarket, restaurant and showers.

Studios Ktima Holovan (☎ 25510 98335; 6976695591; d/t €70/80) Located 16km east of Kamariotissa, before the Fonias River, this is a relaxing place for families or groups of friends. While the friendly owners would seem to offer enough with these very modern, two-room self-catering studios set on a grassy lawn 50m from the beach, and a mini-playground for kids, the price also includes a free rental car.

Mariya Bungalows (☎ 25510 98230; fax 25510 98374; d incl breakfast €80; 🍷) These secluded bungalows, with breezy modern rooms, enjoy a great setting on a lush hill side near a waterfall. To reach the bungalows take the turning from the coast road, which leads inland towards Loutra, and then the first left. Follow the signs to the bungalows, which is 600m further.

Most of the food offerings in Loutra are *souvlaki* joints, though **Paradisos Restaurant** (☎ 25510 95267; mains €5-7) at the back of the village and **Fengari Restaurant** (☎ 25510 98321; mains €5.50-9) are two reasonable options, the latter slightly more adventurous; try its stuffed goat or *imam tourolou* (roast eggplant stuffed with potatoes and pumpkin).

Kafeio Ta Therma (☎ 25510 98325) is also a very popular place in the town centre. This big open café near the baths is always full, whether for coffee in the morning, beer at night or home-made fruit sweets any time.

Fonias River

After Loutra on the northeast coast is the Fonias River, where the famous **Vathres rock pools** (admission €1) are located. The walk starts at the river bridge 4.7km east of Loutra, by the ticket booths. However, the site is unfenced and the ticket booths are only open in summer. The first 40 minutes of the walk are easy and on a well-marked track; you will then reach a large rock pool fed by a dramatic 12m-high waterfall. The cold water is very refreshing on a hot summer's day. The river is known as the 'Murderer', and in winter rains can transform the waters into a raging torrent. The real danger, however, is getting lost: though there are six waterfalls, marked paths only run to the first two; after that, the walk

becomes dangerously confusing. For serious hiking here and in the Mt Fengari area, first consult **Niki Tours** (☎ 25510 41465; niki_tours@hotmail.com) in Kamariotissa.

Beaches

Samothraki's best beach is the 800m-long **Pahia Ammos**, a superb stretch of sand along an 8km winding road from Lakoma on the south coast. In summer caïques from Kamariotissa may visit the beach, and the boat tour from Loutra stops around the headland at the equally superb, nudist-friendly **Vatos Beach**.

From Pahia Ammos, the former Greek island of Imvros (Gökçeada), ceded to the Turks under the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, is sometimes visible.

Samothraki's other superlative beach, the pebbled **Kipos Beach** on the southeast coast, is accessible via the road skirting the north coast. The only facilities here are a shower and a freshwater fountain, and there is no shade; like the others, it can be reached in summer by caïque or excursion boat.

Other Villages

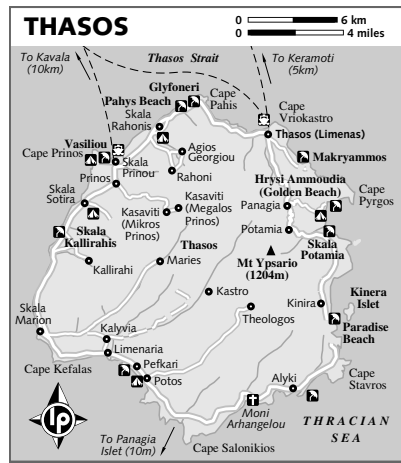
The small villages of **Profitis Ilias**, **Lakoma** and **Xiropotamos** in the southwest, and **Alonia** near Hora, are all serene and seldom visited, though they're linked on asphalt roads. The hill-side Profitis Ilias, with many trees and springs, has several tavernas, of which **Vrahos** (☎ 25510 95264) is famous for its roast goat.

THASOS ΘΑΣΟΣ

pop 13,530

Child friendly, lined with sandy beaches and very green, Thasos is one of the most popular Greek islands for families, though it does attract many 20-somethings, too. Indeed, if you're tired of meeting the same-old Euro/Anglo travellers, then Thasos, much-frequented by natives of ex-Yugoslav republics, Bulgaria and Romania, is the place to go. And, since it's just 10km from Kavala on the mainland, Thasos is an easy hop for independent travellers crossing northern Greece to or from Turkey.

While this proximity to the mainland has brought Thasos within the package-tour orbit, the island is only really crowded in July and August, and even then there are numerous empty beaches and hidden coves tucked away



on its pine-ringed shores, connected by frequent buses plying the circular coastal road. Further inland, Thasos' traditional mountain villages, shaded by huge oaks and plane trees, feature old stone-and-slate architecture, crystal-clear mountain waterfalls, and great hiking and mountain biking opportunities.

The island of Thasos has a long and varied history, and the excellent little archaeological museum in the capital, Thasos (Limenas), tells some of the story. A few Greco-Roman remains in the town, a submerged ancient marble quarry, Byzantine monasteries and Neolithic tombs comprise the island's historical attractions.

In ancient times Thasos became wealthy enough to build a navy, due to its gold deposits. The Parians who founded the ancient city of Thasos (Limenas) in 700 BC struck gold at Mt Pangaion, and started a lucrative export trade. While the gold is long gone, Thasos' ancient gift of white marble – said to be the second whitest in the world – is still being exploited, much to the consternation of local environmentalists who decry the defacement of mountainsides this mining has caused. At the same time subdued exploration for offshore oil continues in the waters between Thasos and Kavala.

Thasos is part of the prefecture of Macedonia, and though an island, is considered more like an aquatic extension of northern Greece. This perception has resulted in a short high season; travellers coming before or after July and August, therefore, can have this, the so-

called 'emerald isle,' all to themselves. Indeed, some of the island's best activities happen in low season. In early spring Greece's largest sea cormorant colony, nesting on the islet of Panagia, hatches its young, and in late April there's the increasingly popular Thasos International Mountain Biking Race.

Getting There & Away

FERRY

Ferries go every two hours in summer between mainland Kavala and Skala Prinou (€3.30, 1¼ hours). Direct ferries to Thasos (Limenas), leave from Keramoti, 46km south-east of Kavala (€2, 40 minutes). The latter is best for those flying in to Kavala's airport, which is much closer to Keramoti than to Kavala. From the airport, take a taxi (€10, 15 minutes) to Keramoti.

On Thasos, get ferry schedules at the **ferry ticket booths** (☎ 25930 22318) and **port police** (☎ 25930 22106) in Thasos (Limenas) and Skala Prinou. The ferry dock for Keramoti is 150m west of Thasos town centre.

HYDROFOIL

Four daily hydrofoils connect Skala Prinou and Kavala (€7.50, 40 minutes); although the competition might tell you they don't, another four daily hydrofoils go directly from Thasos (Limenas) to Kavala (€10, 40 minutes). In Kavala, hydrofoils wait on the dock just behind the main intercity bus station, beside the small port police kiosk.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

While basic bikes are rented in Thasos (Limenas), serious mountain bikers should head to Potos on the west coast, where top-of-the-line models and detailed route information are available from the island's mountain biking expert, **Yiannis Raizis** (☎ 25930 52459; 6946955704; www.mtb-thassos.com).

BUS

At least for its buses, Thasos puts many other Greek islands to shame. Frequent buses circle the coast in both directions and service inland villages, too. Buses to various destinations meet all arriving ferries at Skala Prinou and Thasos (Limenas), the island's transport hub.

There are 10 daily buses from Thasos (Limenas) through the west-coast villages to

Limenaria (€3.80) and Potos (€4), with four continuing to the inland village of Theologos (€5.10). From Thasos (Limenas) four buses daily go further south to the beach village of Alyki (€3.20) and the nearby Moni Arhangelou. From Potos you can follow the same route to these places on to the east coast and Paradise Beach, Skala Potamia (€3.80) and nearby Hrysi Ammoudia (Golden Beach).

In summer 10 daily buses go the other way from Thasos (Limenas) to these east-coast villages, servicing Skala Potamia (€1.50) via Panagia (€1.20) and Potamia (€1.20). Doing a grand circular tour of the island (about 100km) is possible nine times daily (€9.10, 3½ hours), clockwise or counterclockwise. The **bus station** (☎ 25930 22162) on the waterfront in Thasos (Limenas) provides timetables, and sometimes the driver can, too.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Avis Rent a Car Thasos (Limenas) (☎ 25930 22535; fax 25930 23124); Potamia (☎ 25930 61735); Skala Prinou (☎ 25930 72075) has a big presence, though smaller, local companies may offer better rates. In Thasos (Limenas), **Billy's Bikes** (☎ 25930 22490), opposite the Newsagent, and **2 Wheels** (☎ 25930 23267), on the road to Prinos, specialise in bike and motorcycle rental.

EXCURSION BOAT

The **Eros 2 excursion boat** (☎ 6944945282) makes full-day trips (€25) around Thasos four times weekly, with stops for swimming and a barbecue. The boat leaves from the Old Harbour at 10am. Water taxis also run regularly to Hrysi Ammoudia (Golden Beach) and Makryamos beach from the Old Harbour. Excursion boats of varying sizes, nationalities and alcohol content set sail regularly from the coastal resort villages as well.

TAXI

The Thasos (Limenas) **taxi rank** (☎ 25930 223391) is on the central waterfront, next to the main bus stop. In Potos, a taxi rank with listed prices is besides the main road's bus stop.

THASOS (LIMENAS) ΘΑΣΟΣ (ΛΙΜΕΝΑΣ)

pop 2610 / area 375 sq km

The capital, Thasos (also called Limenas), has the island's most services and year-round life, as well as a picturesque fishing harbour, sandy beach, shopping, and moderately edifying an-

cient ruins and an archaeological museum. Still, considering the relatively expensive accommodation rates and lacklustre restaurant offerings, and the superior beaches, mountain forests and nightlife further on, lingering here isn't necessary.

Orientation & Information

Depending on your needs, the town's main shopping thoroughfare (18 Oktovriou) and its touristy shops will seem either an eyesore or an invaluable arsenal for equipping small children for the beach. Several ATMs are found along it near the central square. The National Bank of Greece, on the waterfront, has an ATM. The town beach, backed by waterfront tavernas and beach bars, is about 100m beyond the old harbour, a 10-minute walk from the town centre.

Billias Travel Service (☎ 25930 24003; www.billias-travel-service.gr; Gallikis Arheologikis Scholis 2) An all-services travel agency near the central square.

Children's Arcade (Opposite Hotel Angelica on waterfront) Has bumper cars, air hockey and other diversions.

Mood Café (☎ 25930 23419; cnr 18 Oktovriou & K Dimitriadi; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-2am) Internet café with fast connection.

Newsagent (Theogenous) Sells English-language newspapers.

Port police (☎ 25930 22106)

Tourist police (☎ 25930 23111)

www.gothassos.com Useful inside information and photos of Thasos.

Sights

Thasos' **archaeological museum** (☎ 25930 22180; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sun), next to the ancient *agora* at the Old Harbour, caused a stir when it reopened after a lengthy hiatus. Moreover, it keeps expanding, with the most recent new additions being Neolithic utensils and other finds from a mysterious tomb in central Thasos. Exhibitions from the classic period spotlight Theagenes, an Olympic champion of the 5th century BC. However, the 5m-tall 6th-century BC *kouros* carrying a ram looms largest.

Next to the museum is the **ancient agora**, once the bustling centre of commerce for ancient and Roman Thasos. The foundations of stoas, shops and dwellings remain. Nearby, the **ancient theatre** stages performances of ancient dramas and comedies as part of the Kavala Festival of Drama (p642). The theatre is signposted from the small harbour.



From the theatre a path leads up to the **acropolis** of ancient Thasos, where substantial remains of a medieval fortress stand on the foundations of the town's ancient walls and where there are magnificent views of the coast. A carved rock staircase descends to the ancient wall's foundations. The Limenas–Panagia road is nearby.

Festivals & Events

In July and August performances of various ancient plays are held in the ancient theatre as part of the **Kavala Festival of Drama**. An annual **Full Moon concert** takes place each August; admission is free and singers come from all over Greece to participate. The **EOT** (☎ 25102.22425) in Kavala has information and tickets, or ask at the **tourist police** (☎ 25930 23111) on Thasos. The **Thasos Festival** takes place almost every year during summer, featuring everything from classical drama and painting exhibitions to contemporary Greek rock. Programmes are widely available at hotels, cafés and tourist agencies.

Sleeping

Good budget accommodation in central Thasos (Limenas) is decidedly scarce, though

nice midrange options exist and prices are sometimes lower for walk-in bookings, depending on season and occupancy.

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

Hotel Alkyon (☎ 25930 22148; fax 25930 23662; 18 Oktovriou; s/d €35/45) This almost budget option near the harbour has clean, though fan-equipped, rooms that can get hot at night. Dynamic owner Persephone is famous for her home-made lemon meringue pie.

Hotel Akropolis (☎ /fax 25930 22488; M Alexandrou; s/d ind breakfast €45/55; ☎) This century-old mansion offers a classic touch, with eclectic antiques and a relaxing garden, though rooms are slightly cramped.

our pick Hotel Possidon (☎ 25930 22739; www.thassos-possidon.com; Old Harbour; s/d €45/60; ☎) This friendly waterfront hotel's recently renovated lobby bar straddles both the harbour and main shopping street of 18 Oktovriou. It's one of the few hotels in town that doesn't work with package-tour companies. Rooms are modern and well maintained, many with comfortable balconies overlooking the water. Co-manager Nikos Stefanopoulos is proud to point out

that the Possidon's rooftop bar, where he can sometimes be found playing reggae and world music, is the only one in town.

Hotel Angelica (☎ 25930 22387; www.hotel-angelica.gr; Old Harbour; s/d €50/60; ☎) Another waterfront hotel, the Angelica is a dependable choice, though it does not overwhelm. Bathrooms are a bit dated but clean.

Hotel Mironi (☎ 25930 23256; fax 25930 22132; s/d/t €45/60/70; ☎) On a hill near some of the capital's better bars, the Mironi has an unfailingly polite and helpful staff, though rooms are more adequate than inspirational.

TOP END

Hotel Timoleon (☎ 25930 22177; fax 25930 23277; Old Harbour; s/d €70/100; ☎) Located next to the Hotel Possidon on the waterfront, the three-star Timoleon has 30 rooms (15 with sea view) characterised by smooth fixtures and spacious interiors; considering the price, though, perhaps not unique enough.

Amfipolis Hotel (☎ 25930 23101; www.hotelamfipolis.gr; nr 18 Oktovriou & Theogenous; s/d/ste ind breakfast €80/120/200; ☎ Jun-Oct; ☎) A grand recent renovation has brought wi-fi and a garden Jacuzzi seating five, among other innovations, to this national heritage-listed hotel with an imposing blue façade. Unquestionably the town's poshest place to stay, the Amfipolis, a hotel since 1938 and previous to that a tobacco warehouse, has elegant rooms with high, wood-panelled ceilings. Its well-known restaurant was closed at the time of writing, but was expected to reopen by this book's publication.

Makryammos Bungalows (☎ 25930 22101; www.makryammos-hotel.gr; s/d/tr ind breakfast & dinner €145/195/242; ☎ ☎) This beach-front family resort 2km southeast of Thasos (Limenas) offers a small zoo, mini-club, tennis and basketball courts, and a pool for children, and for your inner child, yoga, tai chi and pottery classes. The hotel's unique layout means that its 200 or so bungalows are all but hidden in wooded groves behind the beach, guaranteeing privacy and serenity. Several on-site restaurants and bars add to the resort feel, as does the private boat running guests over to Thasos (Limenas) several times daily.

Eating & Drinking

Dining in Thasos (Limenas) has become both more bland and more expensive, as beach-front restaurants bank on location to save them from innovation. The drinking scene is

more sedate than at the coastal beach resorts, though satisfactory watering holes do exist.

I Pigi Grill Room (☎ 25930 22941; Central Square; mains €5-7.50; ☎ dinner) This friendly, central restaurant next to a Spring can seem to blend in with other nearby eateries, but is a cut above when it comes to Greek meats; seafood mezedhes and fresh salads are good, too.

Simi (☎ 25930 22517; Old Harbour; mains €7-10) At first glance, Simi looks like all the other Old Harbour tavernas with touting waiters; however, locals agree that it's the best place in town for fresh fish. A full menu of other food, including mezedhes and meat, is also offered.

Taverna Tarsanas (☎ 25930 23933; mezedhes €4, mains €10-15) Located 1km west of Thasos on the site of a former boatbuilder's, Tarsanas is known for its great fresh fish and unique seafood mezedhes.

To Karanti (☎ 25930 24014; Miaouli) An outdoor *ouzerie* on the Old Harbour frequented by locals as well as by tourists, To Karanti's picturesque setting opposite bobbing fishing boats is complemented by its traditional Greek music and tasty mezedhes.

Drift (Old Harbour) This chilled-out beach bar with wispy coloured curtains comes alive at night when its young international crowd trades in their frappes for cocktails.

Karnagio (☎ 25930 23170) Any long leisurely walk beyond the Old Harbour is made worthwhile when it ends at Karnagio, a nice open spot for a quiet sunset drink near the beach.

Grand Café (☎ 6948573947; nr K Dimitriadi & Pavlou Melas; ☎ until late) Perhaps the best regular bar in Thasos (Limenas), the Grand Café has soft corner couches and caters to a mixed Greek/international crowd. In the same area as the town's few nightclubs, it's visible from its checkerboard pillars out the front. Friendly owner Dimitris Dimitriadis insists he was not named after the street on which his bar is located.

WEST COAST

Thasos' west coast consists of sandy beaches hidden by pines and seaside villages, which are accompanied by almost homonymous settlements further inland, the latter presaging the little-visited mountain wilds of central Thasos. There are ATMs in Skala Prinou, Limenaria and Potos.

Following the coast southwest from Thasos (Limenas), two sandy beaches emerge, first **Glyfoneri** and then **Pahys Beach**. The first real village, **Skala Rahonis**, is a package-tour destination, but

has an excellent camping ground. The next coastal village, the port of **Skala Prinou**, is where you get on or off ferries to Kavala; though it has some services, accommodation and an ATM, there's little reason to linger. However, 1km south, the lovely beach of **Vasiliou** stands backed by trees, and the inland, hill-side villages of **Mikros Prinos** and **Megalos Prinos** (collectively known as **Kasaviti**) offer a refreshingly lush break from the touristed coast. Further down, two more small beaches appear at **Skala Sotira** and **Skala Kallirahis**. Some 2km inland from the latter, traditional **Kallirahi** features steep narrow streets and old stone houses.

Further on, **Maries** is another lovely inland village, accessible from its coastal companion, **Skala Marion**. The improbable turn-of-the-century capital of German industry on Thasos, Skala Marion is where long ago the Speidel Metal Company mined iron ore for export. Beaches line both sides of the village, and continue in long stretches between it and **Limenaria**, Thasos' second-largest town. Although it looks rather ungainly from the road, Limenaria has a nice, though small, sandy beach. The allure of the German industrialists accounts for its creation in 1903, and Speidel's ruined buildings, including a circular tower, still loom over the sea by the waterfront.

A few kilometres further south, the fishing-villages-turned-resorts of **Potos** and **Pefkari** have long sandy beaches, half of the former now lined with cafés and tavernas. Potos is a good base for exploring southwestern Thasos. A wooded 10km road leads inland from it to **Theologos**, Thasos' medieval and Ottoman capital. Theologos is a beautiful traditional village of whitewashed stone-and-slate houses set amid mountain foliage, and enjoys regular public bus service.

The drive southeast from Potos rounding the coast opens onto stunning, cliff-top views of southern bays, some with pristine sandy beaches that are usually almost empty and accessible by dirt roads. Continuing east on the main road, you will soon enough come upon **Moni Arhangelou** (admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Sun), an Athonite dependency and working nunnery, where those improperly attired will get shawled up for the tour of the monastery and its 400-year-old church; as at many Orthodox monasteries, pilgrims can stay overnight for free provided they attend services. Built on top of cliffs, the monastery has magnificent views of the sea, coast and far-off Mt Athos.

Activities

Nature lovers and outdoor-sports enthusiasts will be satiated on Thasos' west coast, where the range of activities includes scuba diving, mountain biking, bird-watching and more.

From Potos, bird-watching boat trips to little **Panagia Islet**, a rocky, uninhabited islet covered with wild olive trees, and home to Greece's largest colony of sea cormorants, can be arranged by local environmentalist Yiannis Markianos at Aldebaran Pension (opposite).

Also from Potos, the annual **Thasos International Mountain Biking Race** kicks off on the last Sunday in April. Fast becoming Greece's most popular amateur race, drawing over 200 contestants and counting, this 53km event follows a circular route from Potos east across the island's wooded interior, scales the 1204m Mt Ypsario and returns through the scenic village of Kastro. Incredibly, the entry fee is only €20, including three nights' hotel accommodation. To participate, contact **Yiannis Raizis** (☎ 25930 52459; 6946955704; www.mtb-thasos.com). Yiannis also rents high-quality mountain bikes year-round from his domatia in Potos, and runs guided biking and hiking tours of Thasos' hidden interior.

Further north, at the inland village of **Rahoni**, **Pine Tree Paddock** (☎ 6945118961; ☞ 10am-2pm & 5pm-sunset) rents mountain ponies and horses (per hour €20), and does guided trail rides (per hour €25); call 24 hours in advance to reserve.

Scuba-diving lessons for beginners and excursions for the experienced are both offered in Potos by Vasilis Vasilidiadis of **Diving Club Vasilidiadis** (☎ 6944542974; www.scuba-vas.gr); one of the most popular dives takes you to the underwater ancient marble quarry near Alyki on the south coast.

Sleeping

The seaside villages and coast are lined with signposted hotels and domatia. Inland villages sometimes have rooms, too.

Camping Pefkari (☎ 25930 51190; sites per adult/tent €3.60/4.30; ☞ Jun-Sep) Located on a wooded spot above Pefkari beach, this appealing camping ground is popular with families and has very clean bathrooms; a minimum three-night stay is required.

Camping Daedalos (☎/fax 25930 58251; sites per adult/tent around €5/2.50) Camping north of Skala Sotira is made easy at Daedalos, where tents can be rented. This beach-front camping ground includes a minimarket and restaurant.

Sailing, windsurfing and water-skiing lessons are offered, too.

our pick Aldebaran Pension (☎ 25930 52494, 6973209576; www.gothassos.com; Potos; d from €20; ☞) One street back from Potos beach, and set in a relaxing, leafy courtyard, rooms at this great budget family-run hotel have satellite TV, refrigerator and generous balconies. Travellers can benefit from the vast local knowledge of friendly owner Yiannis Markianos, who also runs the informative Gothassos.com website. Yiannis rents boats and can arrange bird-watching boat trips to Panagia Islet.

MTB Yiannis Raizis Domatia (☎ 25930 52459, 6946955704; www.mtb-thasos.com; Potos; d/tr/q €45/50/55; ☞) A good option for large groups, these spacious self-catering studios run by mountain biking enthusiast Yiannis Raizis fit two to eight people. The place is located on Potos' main road, 20m past the church and a five-minute walk from the beach. There are sea views from the roof garden, an adjacent pool and shaded lawn bar, and a weekly 'curry night' to placate British guests.

Alexandra Beach Hotel (☎ 25930 52391; www.alexandrabeach.gr; d incl full board from €150; P ☞ ☞) One of Thasos' very few real resorts, the Alexandra Beach offers everything from total relaxation 'antistress programmes' to active activities such as tennis and volleyball, and it has two mini-soccer fields: nonguests can pay to play. Unfortunately, few rooms have sea views.

Eating

O Georgios (☎ 25930 52774; mains €4.50-7) This traditional Greek grillhouse set in a pebbled rose garden is a local favourite away from the tourist strip on Potos' main road, offering friendly service and big portions. Try the excellent, slow-roasted pork and chicken, or get adventurous with *sykoti* (liver), *kokoretsi* (lamb innards) or *kefalaki* (lamb brain) – all washed down, of course, with a cold beer.

Piatsa Michalis (☎ 25930 51574; mains €5.50-8) This 48-year-old beachfront taverna in Potos likes to start you off with a complementary ouzo and finish you with a complementary sweet Greek cake. In between, try the stewed rabbit or octopus in red-wine sauce, or choose from the day's fresh fish – which might just include the infamous sea scorpion.

Pefkospilia (☎ 25930 81051; mezedhes €3-6, mains €8-12) At Pahys Beach, in the shade of a large pine tree, this family-run taverna is strong on fish, such as the prized *mourmoura* (striped

seabream), crab salad, and octopus and squid dishes.

Psarotaverna To Limani (☎ 25930 52790; mains €8-13) The best spot for seafood in Limenaria, this waterfront restaurant opposite the National Bank of Greece has a good range of fresh fish, though prices can be steep.

Ciao Tropical Beach Bar (☎ 25930 81136) On Pahys Beach, this is the bar to kick back and feel Hawaiian. All the fixtures, from the umbrellas to the wood-carved lamps and furniture, have been crafted by the owner's own hand, and the drinks have a similarly South-Seas character.

EAST COAST

Thasos' east coast has the island's most famous long sandy beaches, and they do get packed in summer; nevertheless, it's less built up than the west coast and has a more relaxed feel. It also has some unique mountain villages and great natural attractions. The curious road signs on the main road near the inland mountain villages of **Panagia** and **Potamia**, referring to (Thasos) Limenas as Limin, date from a time when Panagia was the island's capital and Limenas just its harbour; the word Limin is the ancient Greek term for Limenas, and the old signs are residual reminders of the Katharevousa (linguistic 'cleansing') movement popular in the mid-20th century, which sought, unsuccessfully, to replace modern Greek with an archaizing 'high' form of the language.

Despite being popular with tourists, these villages have retained their characteristic architecture, especially Panagia with its stone-and-slate rooftops and sumptuously decorated, blue-and-white domed **Church of the Kimisis tou Theotokou** (Church of the Dormition of the Virgin), which also has a valuable icon collection. To reach this peaceful quarter, follow the sound of rushing spring water upwards along a stone path heading inland. Potamia is less picturesque, but does boast a museum devoted to Greek-American artist Polygnotos Vagis, who was born here in 1894; the **Polygnotos Vagis Museum** (☎ 25930 61400; admission €3; ☞ 8.30am-noon & 6-8pm Tue-Sat, until noon Sun & holidays) is beside the main church. (The Municipal Museum of Kavala also has a collection of Vagis' work – see p297.)

Potamia also makes a good jumping-off point for climbing Thasos' highest peak, **Mt Ypsario** (1204m), and for general hiking. A tractor trail west from Potamia continues to

the valley's end, after which arrows and cairns point the way along a steep path upwards. The Ypsario hike is classified as being of 'moderate difficulty' and takes about three hours. You can sleep over at the **Ypsario Mountain Shelter** (☎ 6972198032; shelter €5), but first phone Leftheris of the Thasos Mountaineering Club (☎ 6972198032) in Thasos (Limenas) to book and pick up the key. The shelter has no electricity, but fireplaces and spring water are provided.

Both Panagia and Potamia are 4km west of the celebrated **Hrysi Ammoudia (Golden Beach)**, fine and sandy and tucked inside a long, curving bay. A short rocky stretch in the middle separates Hrysi Ammoudia from the equally sandy **Skala Potamia** on the southern end. The latter beach has very warm and gentle water, remaining shallow for a long way out, and so is especially good for small children. A bus between the two beaches (€1.20) runs every couple of hours. Both have accommodation, restaurants and some manner of nightlife. There is one Commercial Bank ATM in Skala Potamia, rather oddly set all by itself on the main road, 150m west of the village turn-off.

Further south of Skala Potamia is the nudist-friendly **Paradise Beach**, near the tiny village of **Kinira**; a similarly named islet lies just offshore. Accommodation and services are much more reduced both here and at **Alyki**, the last major beach on the southeast coast. Its two quiet stretches of sand lie back to back on a headland. A small **archaeological site** lies near the southern beach, where an ancient, now submerged **marble quarry** operated from the 6th century BC to the 6th century AD.

Sleeping & Eating

Domatia and small hotels run sporadically down the coast. There are much fewer at Kinira (Paradise Beach) and Alyki than at Hrysi Ammoudia (Golden Beach) and Skala Potamia. At the latter, you can find simple domatia on arrival during high season, even on the beach, especially in the rocky central section dividing Hrysi Amoudia from Skala Potamia beach.

Golden Beach Camping (☎ 25930 61472; fax 25930 61473; Hrysi Ammoudia; sites per adult/tent €3.80/4.20) A party feel pervades Golden Beach, the only camping ground in eastern Thasos. Boasting a minimarket, bar, beach volleyball, and a strong representation of young people from Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and beyond, Golden Beach is a fun place to be on the best part of the beach.

Hotel Kamelia (☎ 25930 61463; www.hotel-kamelia.gr; Skala Potamia; s/d incl breakfast from €35/54) This recently renovated beach-front hotel has an understated, arty appeal, with flowery canvases, minimalist wall sculptures and cool jazz playing in the lawn-garden bar. The spacious, fresh-smelling rooms have large balconies and all mod cons.

Semeli Studios (☎ 25930 61612; www.semeli-studios.gr; Skala Potamia; d/t €50/60) The Kamelia's friendly owner Eleni Stoubou also has these larger, self-catering options just behind the hotel. From the bus stop, head towards Hryssi Ammoudia on the main road for 100m; both Hotel Kamelia and Semeli Studios are signposted on the right.

Studios Stefanos (☎ 25930 58160; www.thasos.info/stefanos; Hrysi Ammoudia; s/d €60/65) Located just across from Golden Beach Camping, these self-catering studios are kept in good order by the gracious owner, who also runs a well-stocked bar below.

Thassos Inn (☎ 25930 61612; www.thassosinn.gr; Panagia; s/d €50/70) Panagia's best accommodation has a perfect location near the church, with sweeping views of the village's clustered slate rooftops. It has all mod cons and good-sized rooms, though the simple floors are uninspiring. Even if you don't stay, drop in for a coffee on the inn's relaxing patio café – the only place in town serving frappé with ice cream. The inn is run by the welcoming Tasos Manolopoulos, who proudly shows off his vegetable patch and pool of gigantic goldfish.

Taverna Elena (☎ 25930 61709; Panagia; mains €4.50-8) Just next to the traditional products shop off Panagia's central square, this classic taverna has unexpected mezedhes like *bougloundi* (baked feta with tomatoes and chili), and excellent roast lamb and goat.

Restaurant Koralli (☎ 25930 62244; Skala Potamia; mains €6.50-9.50) A big, multilingual menu and waterfront setting often indicates more of the same, but some unique offerings make Koralli stand out. Tasty innovations at this Skala Potamia taverna include mushrooms stuffed with shrimp, eggplant baked with mozzarella and parmesan, zucchinis stuffed with crab, carpaccio and 330g sirloin steaks.

Restaurant Vigli (☎ 25930 61500; Hrysi Ammoudia; fish €8-10) Enjoying the excellent view of the Golden Beach/Skala Potamia bay is only half the experience at this fish taverna up on the northern edge of Hrysi Ammoudia; the fresh fish provides the rest.

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