

Greece



Peloponnese (PDF Chapter)

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Peloponnese

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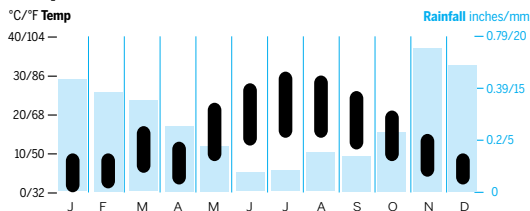
Why Go?

The Peloponnese (pe-lo-po-nih-sos; Πελοπόννησος) is the stuff of legends. Literally. It is here that Hercules fought the Nemean lion and gods walked the earth, meddling in mortal affairs; it's from here that Paris of Troy eloped with Helen and the Argonauts set sail in search of the Golden Fleece. Celestial and mythological charms aside, this region bears tangible traces of the many civilisations that once called it home, witnessed in its classical temples, Mycenaean palaces, Byzantine cities, and Ottoman, Frankish and Venetian fortresses.

The very topography that kept invaders at bay for centuries – lofty, snowcapped mountains, vast gorges, sandy beaches and azure waters – now draws visitors of a very different kind. *Filoxenia* (hospitality) is as strong here as anywhere in the country; the food is among Greece's best; and the region's vineyards are contributing to Greece's wine renaissance. Locals claim to have the best of everything to give. And that's no myth.

When to Go

Nafplio



Apr–Jun Perfect hiking and beach weather, without the summer crowds.

Sep Take part in the gruelling Spartathlon...if you think you're tough enough.

Easter The pomp and ceremony of religious festivities during Orthodox Easter week are unforgettable.

History

Since ancient times the Peloponnese (named after the mythical Pelops) has played a major role in Greek history. When the Minoan civilisation declined after 1450 BC, the focus of power in the ancient Aegean world moved from Crete to the hill-fortress palaces of Mycenae and Tiryns in the Peloponnese. As elsewhere in Greece, the 400 years following the Dorian conquests in the 12th century BC are known as the Dark Ages. When the region emerged from darkness in the 7th century BC, Athens' arch rival, Sparta, had surpassed Mycenae as the most powerful city in the Peloponnese, sparking the Peloponnesian Wars (431–04 BC).

A period of peace and prosperity ensued under Roman rule (146 BC to around AD 250) but was shattered by a series of invasions by Goths, Avars and Slavs.

The Byzantines were slow to make inroads into the Peloponnese, only becoming firmly established during the 9th century AD. In 1204, after the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders, the Frankish Crusader chiefs William de Champlitte and Geoffrey de Villehardouin divided the region into 12 fiefs, which they parcelled out to various barons of France, Flanders and Burgundy. These fiefs were overseen by de Villehardouin, the self-appointed prince of the Morea, as the region was called in medieval times.

The Byzantines gradually won back the Morea and although the empire as a whole was now in decline, a glorious renaissance took place in the area, centred on Mystras, the region's seat of government.

The Morea fell to the Turks in 1460, and hundreds of years of power struggles between the Turks and Venetians followed. The Venetians had long coveted the Morea and succeeded in establishing profitable trading ports at Methoni, Pylos, Koroni and Monemvasia.

The Greek War of Independence supposedly began in the Peloponnese, when Bishop Germanos of Patra raised the flag of revolt near Kalavryta on 25 March 1821. The Egyptian army, under the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha, brutally restored Turkish rule in 1825.

In 1827 the Triple Alliance of Great Britain, France and Russia – moved by Greek suffering and by the activities of philhellenes (the death of Lord Byron in 1824 was particularly influential) – came to the rescue of the Greeks by destroying the Turkish–Egyptian fleet at the Battle of Navarino, ending Turkish domination of the area.

The Peloponnese became part of the independent state of Greece, and Nafplio became the first national capital. Ioannis Kapodistrias, Greece's first president, was assassinated on the steps of Nafplio's Church of St Spyridon in October 1831, and the new king, Otto, moved the capital to Athens in 1834.

Like the rest of Greece, the Peloponnese suffered badly during WWII and the civil war (1944–49) that followed. During the 1950s many villagers migrated to Athens, and further abroad to Australia, Canada, South Africa and the USA.

i Information

Due to the Greek financial crisis, the hours of museums and sites in the Peloponnese are particularly vulnerable to change. Check in advance.

i Getting There & Around

BUSES

Be aware of the difference between Corinth Isthmus (the canal) and Corinth (the city). Located on a main road on the Peloponnese side of the Corinth Canal, the **Corinth Isthmus (Peloponnese) KTEL bus station** (☎27410 75410, in Athens 210 512 4919) is the spot to change for buses south to the rest of the Peloponnese. No formal timetables are available; most buses from Athens heading to the Peloponnese stop here.

The **KTEL Korinthos bus station** (☎27410 75425; www.ktel-korinthias.gr; Dimocratias 4) in Corinth (city) is the departure point for buses to Ancient Corinth (€1.60, 20 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday), Nemea (€4.50, one hour, four to five daily, one Sunday) and Loutraki (for Corinth Isthmus; €1.70, 10 minutes, half-hourly).

Weekend bus services range from infrequent to nonexistent.

CAR

If driving the winding, scenic minor roads across the peninsula, always allow yourself plenty of time. When going around sharp bends, watch out for oncoming drivers who can tend to cut across your lane without sounding their horn.

At research time, the E65, the coastal motorway that connects Athens to Patra, was in the process of being turned into a four-lane highway; however, work has been suspended in the past due to lack of funding. The barrier in the middle of the road means travelling in heavy traffic at the speed of the slowest vehicle, with few opportunities for overtaking.

TRAINS

At research time the OSE train services in the Peloponnese were suspended. Only one line – Athens to Patra – was operating, with a replacement bus service between Kiato and Patra.

Peloponnese Highlights

1 Soaking up the past and present of **Nafplio** (p138) and **Monemvasia** (p154).

2 Marvelling at the sanctuary of **Ancient Olympia** (p173), birthplace of the Olympic Games.

3 Hiking the remote and rugged **Mani** (p157) and staying in traditional Maniot tower houses.

4 Hiking the **Menalon Trail** (p146) through the **Lousios Gorge** and discovering the delights of charming mountain villages **Stemnitza** and **Dimitsana**.

5 Meandering through the magical **Mystras** (p152), a World Heritage-listed Byzantine site.

6 Exploring the historic sites of **Ancient Mycenae** (p135), **Ancient Nemea** (p133) and **Epidavros** (p143).

7 Tackling the dramatic **Vouraikos Gorge** (p184) via the unique rack-and-pinion train or on foot from the historic village of Kalavryta.





The *proastiako*, Athens' suburban rail service, runs between Kiato, Corinth (city) train station and Athens international airport (around €12, 1½ hours, around eight daily). A handy bus shuttles between Corinth city's Plateia Kentriki (€1.50, 20 minutes) and the train station.

A small local train runs between Pyrgos and Olympia (for Ancient Olympia) and a rack-and-pinion railway connects Diakofto with Kalavryta.

CORINTHIA KOPINΘΙΑ

Corinthia has had a rich and tumultuous history, owing largely to its strategic position adjoining the Corinth Isthmus. Throughout time several empires have wrestled here for dominance over the Peloponnese: the Romans constructed a vast wall across the isthmus; many centuries later the Turks overran it; and pretty much everyone else has attempted to carve a canal across it.

Once dominated by the mighty ancient city of Corinth, Corinthia is now the keeper of its remains.

In the pretty hinterland west of Corinth you can take part in the resurrected Nemean Games, or travel the Nemea region's wine route in search of Greece's best vintages.

Ancient Corinth & Acrocorinth

Αρχαία Κόρινθος & Ακροκόρινθος

Ancient Corinth was an affluent and powerful city during its first golden age. Earthquakes and centuries of pillage, however, have left only the remnants of once-grand buildings, 7km southwest of the modern city, surrounded by the village of Ancient Corinth and overlooked by the Acrocorinth fortress.

History

During the 6th century BC Corinth was one of Ancient Greece's richest cities, thanks to its strategic position on the Corinth Isthmus. Its twin ports, one on the Aegean Sea (Kenchreai, near Kechries) and one on the Ionian side (Lecheon), enabled it to trade throughout the Mediterranean. It survived the Peloponnesian Wars and flourished under Macedonian rule, but it was sacked by the Roman consul Mummius in 146 BC for rebelling against Roman rule. In 44 BC Julius Caesar began rebuilding the city and it again became a prosperous port.

Sights

★ Ancient Corinth

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

(📍 27410 31207; admission €6; 🕒 8.30am-8pm)

In the centre of a modern village loom the extensive yet compact ruins of this ancient (mostly Roman) city. Home to the legendary Jason of the Argonauts, stealer of the Golden Fleece, the streets of Ancient Corinth were once trodden by the likes of Roman traveller Pausanias and St Paul, who taught the gospel of Christ in vain here. You can follow in their footsteps by visiting the Temple of Apollo, the Peribolos of Apollo, the ancient theatre and other site highlights. The on-site museum puts everything into context.

An exception to the Roman ruins is the prominent 5th-century-BC Doric **Temple of Apollo**. To the south of this temple is a huge **agora** (market) bounded on its southern side by the foundations of a **stoa** (long colonnaded building). This was built to accommodate the bigwigs summoned here in 337 BC by Philip II to sign oaths of allegiance to Macedon. In the middle of the central row of shops is a **bema**, a marble podium from which Roman officials addressed the people.

At the eastern end of the *agora* are the remains of the Julian basilica. To the north is the **Lower Peirene fountain** – the Upper Peirene fountain is on Acrocorinth. According to mythology, Peirene wept so much when her son Kenchrias was killed by Artemis that the gods, rather than let all the precious water go to waste, turned her into a fountain.

West of the fountain, steps lead to the Lecheon road, once the main thoroughfare to the port of Lecheon. On the east side of the road is the **Peribolos of Apollo**, a courtyard flanked by Ionic columns, some of which have been restored. Nearby is a public latrine, where some seats remain.

South of the museum are the columns of **Temple E** (Pausanias describes it as being dedicated to Octavia, sister of Augustus).

The site's excellent **museum** has three main rooms: the first two exhibit fine Greek and Roman statues, mosaics, figurines, reliefs and friezes. The third room houses the finds of excavations at the nearby Sanctuary of Asklepios (500 BC). Highlights include grave markers, votive genitalia from the 4th century BC and an ancient 'keep off the grass' sign.

Opposite the site entrance is the **ancient theatre**, built in the 5th century BC for up to 15,000 spectators, and the Roman **odeion** (indoor theatre), from the 1st century AD.

Acrocorinth

FORTRESS

(☉ 8am-8pm) **FREE** High up above Ancient Corinth, crowning the sheer bulk of limestone known as Acrocorinth, are the ruins of one of the finest natural fortifications in Ancient Greece. Cast your eyes upwards and you'll give an involuntary gasp. Commanding wonderful views over the surrounding region, the fortress is a stiff but utterly worthwhile 4km uphill hike (or taxi ride) if you don't have your own wheels.

The original fortress has been modified many times over the centuries by a string of invaders. Passing through the three gates (Turkish, Frankish and Byzantine), you can explore the medley of imposing Roman, Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian and Turkish ramparts, harbouring remains of Byzantine chapels, Turkish houses and mosques.

From the main path, the right fork leads to the remains of a 14th-century **Frankish keep**. The central path leads you to the **Fountain of Peirene**, the favourite watering hole of Pegasus the winged horse. Accessible by the left-hand path, on the higher of Acrocorinth's two summits are the remains of the **Temple of Aphrodite**, where sacred courtesans catered to the desires of the insatiable Corinthians.

Wear stout shoes and take plenty of water.

Ancient Nemea

Αρχαία Νεμέα

Situated 31km southwest of Corinth, on the northeastern edge of modern Nemea, **Ancient Nemea** (☎ 27460 22739; site, museum & stadium adult/concession €4/2, site & museum adult/concession €3/2; ☉ museum 8am-3pm) was once the venue for the biennial Nemean Games, held in honour of Zeus. Three original columns of the imposing 4th-century-BC Doric Temple of Zeus survive, and the on-site museum displays rich finds from the area. The stadium where the Games were held is nearby; once connected to the sanctuary by a sacred road, it plays host to the resurrected Games once again, the next in 2016.

Like Ancient Olympia, Nemea was not a city but a **sanctuary of Zeus**. The Nemean Games were hosted by the nearby city of Kleonai and became one of the great Panhellenic festivals. There's a mythological side to Nemea as well: it was around here that Hercules carried out the first of his labours – the slaying of the lion that had been sent by Hera to destroy Nemea. After Hercules had killed the lion by lifting it off the ground and choking it to death, using his prodigious strength, the lion became the constellation

CORINTH CANAL

ΤΗΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΟΥ

The Corinth Canal is an engineering marvel. A project that spanned many centuries, it was conceived by a ruler of Ancient Corinth, begun by Roman emperor Nero and completed in the 19th century by the French. Cut through solid rock, the canal is more than 6km long and 23m wide, its vertical sides rising 90m above the water. The canal did much to elevate Piraeus' status as a major Mediterranean port and is particularly impressive when a ship is passing through.

The concept of cutting a canal through the Corinth Isthmus to link the Ionian and Aegean Seas was first proposed by Periander, tyrant of Ancient Corinth at the end of the 7th century BC. The magnitude of the task defeated him, so he opted instead to build a *diolkos* (paved slipway), across which sailors dragged small ships on rollers, a method used until the 13th century.

In the intervening years many leaders, including Alexander the Great and Caligula, toyed with the canal idea, but it was Nero who struck the first blow himself, using a golden pickaxe in AD 67 before leaving it to 6000 Jewish slaves to do the hard work. The project was soon halted by invasions by the Gauls. Ironically, it was a French engineering company that finally completed the canal in 1893.

If you're adventurous, **Zulu Bungy Jump** (☎ 693 270 2535; www.zulubungy.com; €60; ☉ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Jun-Sep) offers the chance to see the canal walls from a unique angle.

If you have your own transport, head to nearby **Isthmia** to the submersible bridge, one of two bridges crossing the canal. The nearby banks are great vantage points if you're lucky enough to be there when a ship passes over the submerged bridge.

All buses from Athens pass over the bridge and stop at the Corinth Isthmus KTEL bus station (p129), 200m from the canal.

NEMEA'S WINE ROUTE

In the rolling hills southwest of Corinth, the Nemea region is one of Greece's premier wine-producing areas, famous for its full-bodied reds, many produced from the local *agiorgitiko* grape. Look out also for wine made from *roditis*, a local variety of white grape.

Nemea has been known for its fine wines since Mycenaean times, when nearby Phlius supplied the wine for the royal court at Mycenae. Half a dozen or so wineries provide tastings for visitors (many free, some by appointment). The best spots for a tippie include the following:

Lafkiotis Winery (☎ 27460 31000; www.lafkiotis.gr; Ancient Kleonai; ☀ 11am-4pm) The Lafkiotis family has been specialising in wines made from local grape varieties since 1963. Besides the *agiorgitiko*, *agionymo*, Nemea and *rodamos* reds, you can also sample the fruity *moschofilero* white.

Skouras (☎ 27510 23688; www.skouraswines.com; ☎ by appointment) George Skouras has two wineries, one near Argos and the other in the AOC region of Nemea, and has been producing wines from local and international grape varieties since 1986.

Domaine Spiropoulos (☎ 27960 61400; www.domainspiropoulos.com; Corinthos-Tripoli National Rd; ☎ by appointment) With two vineyards that have been in the family since 1860 – one near Nemea and the other one on the Martinia plateau in the heart of the Peloponnese – Apostolos Spiropoulos is a pioneering figure in organic viticulture and produces *moschofilero*, *agiorgitiko*, merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and syrah wines.

Ktima Palivou (☎ 27460 24190; www.palivos.gr; Ancient Nemea; ☎ by appointment) Third-generation winemaker George Palivos specialises in *agiorgitiko* wines.

Gaia Wines (☎ 21080 55642; www.gaia-wines.gr; Koutsis; wine tastings €4-8; ☎ by appointment) North of Nemea in pretty hill country, Gaia Wines produces unfiltered wines, including *appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC) varieties. Its signature wine is the dry white *thalassitis*, made from the *asyrtiko* grape.

Leo (each of Hercules' 12 labours is related to a sign of the zodiac).

It's worth visiting the site's **museum** before seeing the remains of the temple. It has two models of the ancient site – the first shows what it would have looked like in 573 BC, the second in AD 500 – as well as ancient paraphernalia from the Games and treasures from the area's Mycenaean tombs. The jewel of the collection, quite literally, is the Gold of Aidonia, an exquisite assortment of gold rings, seals and beads from the site of Aidonia, near Nemea. Don't miss the video that explains the extraordinarily advanced race-starting mechanism (English subtitles).

At the temple site, the three original columns of the 4th-century-BC **Temple of Zeus** have been joined by six more, reassembled by an American team; reconstruction is in progress. Other ruins include a bathhouse, probably used by athletes to oil up precompetition, and a hostelry.

The **stadium** is 500m back along the road. There's a fantastic view of it in all its restored glory from the the path that skirts it through the pine trees. Alternatively, en-

ter it the way the athletes would have done, through the tunnel hidden behind the columns by the site entrance. The athletes' starting line is still in place, together with the distance markers. Look out for ancient 'graffiti' in the tunnel. Resurrected in 1996, the two-day **Modern Nemean Games** (www.nemeanames.org) take place over two days each Olympic year in June.

i Getting There & Away

Buses to/from Corinth Isthmus (€4.50, one hour, four to five Monday to Saturday, one Sunday) stop on request outside the site on the way to modern Nemea, about 4km northwest.

ARGOLIS

ΑΡΓΟΛΙΔΑ

The Argolis peninsula, which separates the Saronic and Argolic Gulfs, is steeped in legend and history. The town of Argos, from which the region takes its name, is thought to be the longest continually inhabited town in Greece. Argolis was the seat of power of the Mycenaean empire that ruled Greece from 1600 to 1100 BC. Traces of this mighty

civilisation lie scattered across the region in the shape of *tholos* tombs, citadels and ancient theatres. The Venetian seafront town of Nafplio makes a handy base for ventures into the surrounding countryside.



Argos

POP 22,200

The ancient town of Argos stretches back an astonishing 6000 years, though today most vestiges of its past glory lie buried beneath the bustling modern town. Overshadowed by its neighbour, Nafplio (12km away), Argos is worth a detour for its archaeological museum, as well as the nearby ruins and fortress.

Sights


Archaeological Museum of Argos MUSEUM

( 27510 68819; Plateia Agiou Petrou; adult/concession €2/1;  8am-3pm Tue-Sun) Just off the central square, the archaeological museum includes some outstanding and complete Roman mosaics and sculptures in its collection, as well as bronze objects from Mycenaean tombs. Highlights include the statuette of a goddess, a mosaic of the four seasons in the courtyard, a suit of bronze armour from the 8th century BC and some fine Neolithic, Mycenaean and Geometric Age pottery, including some Argive grey and brown vases dating to before 1600 BC. Note the museum was under renovation and closed at research time, with no set reopening date.

Larissa Castle CASTLE


FREE Looming over Argos, Larissa Castle is a crumbling conglomeration of purple-flower-studded towers, bastions and wall sections – contributed by Roman, Frankish, Venetian and Ottoman Turk conquerors – that stands on the foundations of the city's principal ancient citadel. Much of the citadel is undergoing restoration, but the all-encompassing views from the top are well worth the ascent. Take Tsokri street west from the centre and follow the signposts to the narrow road that winds around the back of the ruined keep.

Roman Ruins RUIN

( 8am-3pm) **FREE** Impressive Roman ruins straddle both sides of the Tripolis road. The star attraction is the half-crumbled **theatre**, which originally seated 20,000 people. Dating from Classical times, it was greatly modified by the Romans. Nearby are the remains of a 1st-century-AD **odeion** (a smaller theatre) and **Roman baths**. Opposite is

the **Ancient Agora**. Signs provide diagrams and contextualise the setting. From central Argos, head south along Danaou for about 500m and then turn right onto Theatrou.



Getting There & Away

Just south of the central square, **KTEL Argolis** ( 27510 67324; www.ktel-argolidas.gr; Kapodistriou 8) has bus services to Nafplio (€1.60, 30 minutes, hourly) and Mycenae (€1.60, 30 minutes, two daily except Sunday).

There are also bus services to Athens (€11.90, two hours, 12 to 15 daily) via Corinth Isthmus (€5.20, 50 minutes), and to Tripoli (€6.70, one hour, two daily).

Ancient Mycenae

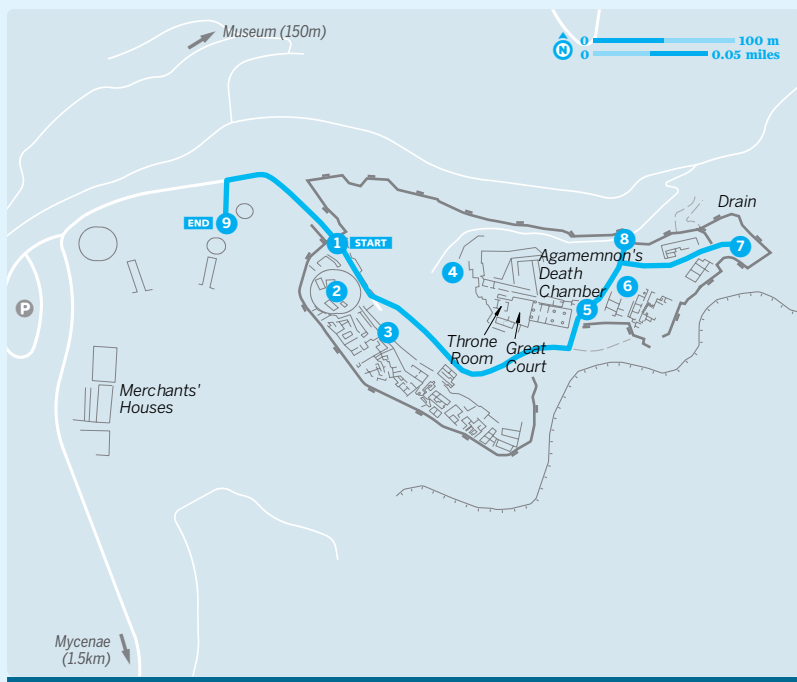
Αρχαία Μυκήνες

In the barren foothills of Mt Agios Ilias (750m) and Mt Zara (600m) stand the sombre and mighty ruins of **Ancient Mycenae** ( 27510 76585; adult/concession €8/4;  8am-8pm Apr-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Mar), home of the mythical Agamemnon. For 400 years (1600–1200 BC) this kingdom was the most powerful in Greece, holding sway over the Argolid and influencing other Mycenaean kingdoms.

History

World Heritage-listed Mycenae is synonymous with the names Homer and Schliemann. In the 9th century BC Homer told in his epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, of 'well-built Mycenae, rich in gold'. These poems were, until the 19th century, regarded as no more than gripping and beautiful legends. But in the 1870s the amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann (1822–90), despite derision from professional archaeologists, struck gold, first at Troy then at Mycenae.

In Mycenae, myth and history are inextricably linked. According to Homer, Mycenae was founded by Perseus, the son of Danae and Zeus. Perseus' greatest heroic deed was the killing of the hideous snake-haired Medusa, whose gaze literally petrified the beholder. Eventually, the dynasty of Perseus was overthrown by Pelops, a son of Tantalus. The Mycenaean Royal House of Atreus was probably descended from Pelops, and by Agamemnon's time the Royal House of Atreus was the most powerful of the Achaeans (Homer's name for the Greeks). It eventually came to a sticky end, fulfilling the curse that had been cast because of Pelops' misdeeds.



Site Tour Citadel of Mycenae

START LION GATE
END THOLOS TOMBS
LENGTH 2.5KM; TWO HOURS

Enter Agamemnon's Palace through the dramatic **1 Lion Gate**, a solid construction of massive stone blocks over which rear two large lionesses. The lion motif is believed to have been the insignia of the Royal House of Atreus.

Inside the citadel, **2 Grave Circle A** is on the right. Five shafts of this royal cemetery were excavated by Heinrich Schliemann between 1874 and 1876, uncovering a rich archaeological haul, including a well-preserved gold death mask. Schliemann sent a telegram to the Greek king stating, 'I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon,' though the mask turned out to belong to an unknown king.

South of Grave Circle A is a group of ruined **3 houses**. The famous Warrior Vase, unearthed here, was regarded by Schliemann as one of his greatest discoveries because it offered a glimpse of what Mycenae's legendary warriors looked like.

Follow the main path up to **4 Agamemnon's Palace**, centred on the Great Court. The rooms to the north were private royal apartments where it is thought that Agamemnon was murdered. On the palace's south-eastern side is the **5 megaron** (reception hall where the great hearth would have been), with the column bases remaining and, beyond this, the **6 artisans' quarters**.

At the northeast extension you'll find the entrance to the **7 secret cistern** in the corner. You'll need a torch to descend the 100 or so steps into the subterranean gloom.

Follow the main path anticlockwise; on the northern boundary of the citadel is the **8 Postern Gate**, through which, it is said, Orestes escaped after murdering his mother.

Until the late 15th century BC the Mycenaeans interred their royal dead in shaft graves; later they used a new form of burial – the beehive-shaped *tholos* tomb. Back outside the Lion Gate, head down to the **tholos tombs** of Aegisthus, with its collapsed roof, and Clytemnestra's tomb, with its dramatic entrance and restored dome roof.

The historical facts are that Mycenae was first settled by Neolithic people in the 6th millennium BC. Between 2100 and 1900 BC, during the Bronze Age, Greece was invaded by people of Indo-European heritage who had crossed Anatolia via Troy to Greece. The newcomers brought an advanced culture to then-primitive Mycenae and other mainland settlements. This new civilisation is now referred to as the Mycenaean, named after its most powerful kingdom. The other kingdoms included Pylos, Tiryns, Corinth and Argos, all in the Peloponnese.

Mycenae consisted of a fortified citadel and surrounding settlement. Due to the sheer size of the citadel walls (13m high and 7m thick), formed by stone blocks weighing 6 tonnes in places, the Ancient Greeks believed they must have been built by a Cyclops, one of the giants described in the *Odyssey*.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the palaces of the Mycenaean kingdoms declined some time around 1200 BC and the palace itself was set ablaze around 1100 BC. Whether the destruction was the work of outsiders or due to internal division between the various Mycenaean kingdoms remains unresolved.

As to whether the Agamemnon of legend ever existed, if Homer's *Odyssey* is to be believed he took part in the siege of Troy around 1100 BC, whereas the tombs attributed to him and his wife date back to around 1300 BC.

Sights

★ Treasury of Atreus (Agamemnon's Tomb)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

(adult/concession incl Ancient Mycenae site & museum €8/4; ☀8am-6pm) Dating back to around 1300 BC, this is the finest existing example of a domed *tholos* tomb, made by filing down the layers of breccia blocks to create the smooth interior. It's wonderfully misnamed, since it has little to do with the mythical Atreus, or with his equally mythical son, Agamemnon, but the interior is truly awe-inspiring, with a 40m-long passage leading to the vast beehive-shaped chamber. Spot the original bronze nails that once held the door in place.

Ancient Mycenae Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/concession incl Ancient Mycenae site & Agamemnon's Tomb €8/4; ☀8am-6pm) Part of the Ancient Mycenae complex, this museum is well worth visiting before seeing the rest of the site. It initiates you into the mysteries of Mycenae's construction, its various incarnations and its excavation from 1841 onwards. The displays run the gamut from fine stirrup jars and fresco fragments to ritual objects, jewellery and bronze weaponry. Replicas of archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann's most spectacular Mycenae finds are also displayed; the originals are in Athens' National Archaeological Museum.

AGAMEMNON, KING OF MYCENAE

Agamemnon, son of Atreus, is one of the principal characters in Homer's epic poem *The Iliad* and crops up regularly in Greek legend. The king of Mycenae, he led the Greeks during the Trojan War.

Agamemnon and his brother Menelaus married the daughters of the King of Sparta, Clytemnestra and Helen, respectively. According to legend, Helen then eloped with Paris, the son of the Trojan king, taking all of her (rather valuable) possessions with her. This was the catalyst for the Trojan War (her face 'had launched a thousand ships'), as Agamemnon called on the Greek princes to unite in a war of revenge. Artemis, the goddess of hunting, however, stalled the departing warships with adverse winds because Agamemnon had angered her by claiming he was the better hunter. To make peace with Artemis, Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. Artemis set the seas right again, and the Greek ships sailed for Troy, where a 10-year siege ensued. In the war's final year, Agamemnon had a jealous quarrel with Achilles over the attentions of a captive female, which could have cost the Greeks the war.

Finally, though, Agamemnon returned home victorious with his war spoils, which included the Trojan princess Cassandra. His victory was short-lived: his wife Clytemnestra was justifiably upset about her sacrificed daughter and murdered Agamemnon with the help of her lover, Aegisthus. In classic dysfunctional-family Greek-legend style, Agamemnon's daughter, Electra, and her brother, Orestes, avenged their father's death by then murdering Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

i Getting There & Away

Two daily buses (excluding Sundays) head to Mycenae from Nafplio (€2.60, one hour) and Argos (€1.60, 30 minutes). Buses stop both in the village and at the ancient site.

Nafplio

POP 14,200

Nafplio, 12km southeast of Argos on the Argolic Gulf, occupies a knockout location on a small port beneath the towering Palamidi fortress. It is graced with attractive narrow streets, elegant Venetian houses, neoclassical mansions and interesting museums. It's also full of quayside cafes, posh boutiques and many comfortable hotels and guesthouses, but it does get seriously overcrowded in high season and holidays.

Nafplio was the first capital of Greece after Independence (between 1833 and 1834) and has been a major port since the Bronze Age. So strategic was its position that it had three fortresses: the massive principal fortress of Palamidi, the smaller Akronafplia and the diminutive Bourtzi on an islet west of the old town.

👁 Sights & Activities

★ Palamidi Fortress

FORTRESS

(📍27520 28036; adult/concession €4/free; 🕒8am-6.45pm) This vast, spectacular citadel, reachable either by steep ascent on foot or a short drive, stands on a 216m-high outcrop of rock that gives all-encompassing views of Nafplio and the Argolic Gulf. It was built by the Venetians between 1711 and 1714, and is regarded as a masterpiece of military architecture in spite of being successfully stormed in one night by Greek troops in 1822, causing the Turkish garrison within to surrender without a fight.

Within its walls stands a series of independent, strategically located bastions. The most important, and best preserved, is the western **Agios Andreas Bastion**, which stands at the top of the steps from town. The former home of the garrison commander, it is named after the tiny church in the courtyard.

The **Miltiades Bastion**, to the northeast, is the largest of the bastions. It was used as a prison for condemned criminals from 1840 to 1920. War of Independence hero Theodoros Kolokotronis spent several years here after being condemned for treason.

There are two main approaches to the fortress. You can go via the road (taxi cost about €10 one way) or tackle the steps that

begin southeast of the bus station. It's 576 steps to the outer gate and 901 steps to the entrance to the castle (we've counted!). Climb early and take water.

★ Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(📍27520 27502; Plateia Syntagmatos; adult/child €3/free; 🕒8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) Inside a splendid Venetian building, this museum traces the social development of Argolis, from the hunter-gatherers of the Fragthi cave to the sophisticated Mycenaean-era civilisations, through beautifully presented archaeological finds from the surrounding area. Exhibits range from Paleolithic fire middens, dating from 32,000 BC, to elaborately painted amphorae (c 520 BC). You may also spot the only existing bronze armour from near Mycenae (3500 years old and complete with boar-tusk helmet), a wealth of funereal offerings and ceremonial clay masks.

Peloponnese Folklore

Foundation Museum

MUSEUM

(📍27520 28947; www.pli.gr; Vasileos Alexandrou 1; admission €2; 🕒9am-2pm Wed-Mon) Established by its philanthropic owner, Nafplio's award-winning museum is a beautifully arranged collection of folk costumes and household items from Nafplio's 19th- and early 20th-century history. Be wowed by the intricate embroidery of traditional costumes and the heavy silver adornments; admire the turn-of-the-century couture and see if you can spot a horse-tricycle. The gift shop sells high-quality local crafts.

Bourtzi

FORTRESS

The island fortress of Bourtzi (1473), which lies about 600m west of the town's port, has served variously as a pirate deterrent, a home for executioners to protect them from vengeance and a hotel. Note that the battlements are identical in design to Moscow's Kremlin; both it and Bourtzi were built by 15th-century Venetians. Boats to the island (return €4) leave from the northeastern end of Akti Miaouli.

Komboloi Museum

MUSEUM

(📍27520 21618; www.komboloi.gr; Staïkopoulou 25; adult/concession €2/free; 🕒9.30am-6.30pm, hours vary seasonally) Whether or not you wish to buy Nafplio's most popular souvenir item – *komboloi* (worry beads) – at the shop below, it's well worth popping into the incense-scented museum upstairs to learn what distinguishes the *komboloi* from prayer beads and why the amber-mastic mix is so special. You may spot tiny wood-

en skulls, black coral inlaid with mother-of-pearl and carved ivory among the adjacent collection of prayer beads belonging to assorted religions.

National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum

GALLERY
(www.nationalgallery.gr; Sidiras Merarhias 23; adult/concession €3/2, Mon free; ☀️ 10am-3pm Mon, Thu & Sat, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Wed & Fri, to 2pm Sun) This arm of the Athens National Gallery is housed in a stunningly restored neoclassical building. It features numerous seascapes and different thematic takes on the 1821 Greek War of Independence, including paintings by Theodoros Vryzakis and Dionysios Tsokos, who are considered the most important Greek artists of the postwar years.

Church of Agios Spyridon

CHURCH
This 18th-century church was the site of an assassination of great political significance to the Greeks. On 9 October 1831 Ioannis Kapodistrias, elected the first president of an independent Greece in 1828, was stabbed and shot near the door of the church by Konstantinos and Georgios Mavromichalis, brother and son of the leader of the Maniots. They had had a bitter disagreement with Kapodistrias over the spoils of victory.

Cruise to Saronic Gulf Islands

BOAT TOUR
(☎️ 27250 59430; www.pegasus-cruises.gr; adult/child €34/17; ☀️ late Apr-late Sep) Pegasus Cruises offers popular full-day trips to the islands of Hydra and Spetses from Tolo, 10km south-east of Nafplio. The tour stops for a couple of hours in each place. You can get to/from

Tolo by taxi (around €12) or bus, depending on the schedule. There are at least two weekly departures (more in July and August).

Tickets are available at travel agencies.

Nafplio Bike

BICYCLE RENTAL
(www.nafplio-bike.gr; Kipou 2; per day €15; ☀️ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) This is the place to hire city and trekking bikes. Hourly rates available.



Beaches

Arvanitia Beach

BEACH
This small pebble beach is just five minutes' walk south of town, tucked beside the Akronafplia fortress, past the Land Gate. For a scenic stroll, take the blustery, cactus-adorned path that skirts the headland from the bottom of the promenade.

Karathona Beach

BEACH
A gorgeous pine-tree-lined 3km path runs from the car park next to Arvanitia Beach to the long, sandy Karathona Beach. It's a flat, easy walk, though the beach could be cleaner. Don't feel like walking? Take 25 Martiou east of town to the end of the road.



Festivals & Events

Nafplio is a good base for visits to Epidavros in July and August for performances at the famous ancient theatre (p144) during the Epidavros Festival, part of the larger cultural Hellenic Festival (p94).

Classical Music Festival

MUSIC
(www.nafplionfestival.gr; ☀️ late May-Jul) Nafplio hosts a classical-music festival, featuring Greek and international performers.

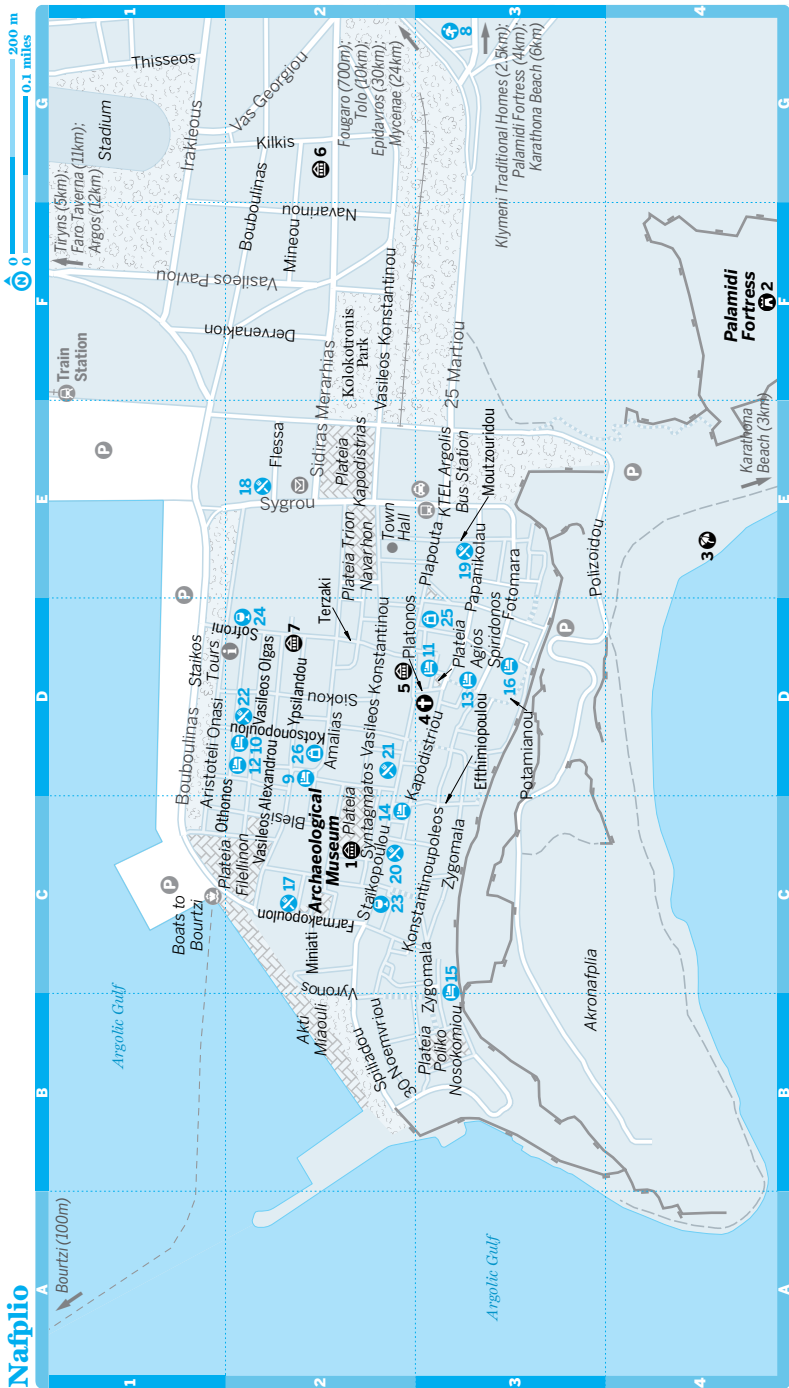
NAFPLIO'S BOUTIQUE SLEEPS

Nafplio's streets burst with boutique hotels. These renovated former mansions vary in style, though most have four to eight (rather compact) rooms with contemporary, period or kitsch furnishings. Prices include cable TV. Note: all have steep internal stairs. We love the following places:

Aetoma (☎️ 27520 27373; www.nafplionhotel.com; Plateia Agios Spiridonos 2; d incl breakfast €75-120; 🛏️ 🚿) Intimate and comfortable, the Aetoma has dark, heavy and stylish furnishings, and hospitable owners who go out of their way to be helpful. Generous traditional breakfast included.

Adiandi (☎️ 27520 22073; www.hotel-adiandi.com; Othonos 31; d incl breakfast €75-110, s/ste incl breakfast €65/130; 🛏️ 🚿) Rooms in this fun place are individually decorated with bright colours, artistic door bedheads and marble sinks. A funky cafe-cum-breakfast-room is downstairs.

Amymone (☎️ 27520 99477; www.amymone.gr; Othonos 39; d incl breakfast €75-105, s/ste incl breakfast €65/130; 🛏️ 🚿) Amymone is all about stencilled art, faux graffiti and Blaxploitation silhouettes on funky door bedsteads. Will appeal to pop art fans. Mod cons and an excellent breakfast included.



Sleeping

★ Nafplion 1841

PENSION €

(☎27520 24622; www.nafplion1841.gr; Kapodistriou 9; s/d incl breakfast €40/45; 🍷🍷) Not only does this delightful pension occupy a 19th-century mansion, but its five bright rooms offer contemporary creature comforts without diminishing the building's character. Expect Cocomat mattresses, superior bed linens, climate control, hydro-massage showers and plasma-screen TVs. The hostess is a delight and so is the breakfast.

Pension Eleni

PENSION €

(☎27520 27036; www.pensioneleni.gr; Zygomala 5; d/tr/ste incl breakfast €45/50/75; 🍷🍷) This friendly pension, tucked away down a quiet street, is run by a Greek grandma who will fuss over you, her hospitality transcending the language barrier. The en suite rooms share a warm colour scheme and sea views; the 'superior' rooms come with thimble-sized balconies. Park in the nearby square.

Klymeni Traditional Homes

APARTMENT €€

(☎27520 96194; www.klymeni.gr; studio/apt incl breakfast €85/105; 🍷🍷) On a hillside overlooking the peaceful countryside, these traditional stone houses offer comfort (luxurious beds, vast living areas, Jacuzzi-style bathtubs) and respite from town traffic while remaining within easy reach of Nafplio. Helpful owner Alexander provides breakfast goodies. Take 25 Martiou out of town for 2.5km towards the Palamidi Fortress.

Pension Marianna

HOTEL €€

(☎27520 24256; www.pensionmarianna.gr; Potamianou 9; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €50/75/95/105; 🍷🍷) For value and hospitality, it doesn't get better than this. The welcoming owner-hosts, the warm Zotos brothers, epitomise Greek *filoxenia* (hospitality) and serve up conviviality, travel advice and delicious breakfasts (comprising homemade produce where possible). The squeaky-clean rooms open onto terraces where you can feast on the killer view from your hilltop position. Rates are €5 less per person without breakfast.

Grand Sarai

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎27520 22563; www.grandsarainafplio.com; Fotomara & Potamianou 3; s incl breakfast €70-145, d incl breakfast €80-150; 🍷) A beautifully renovated pink mansion that's sleek and modern on the inside. Stylish rooms are decorated in neutral tones; most boast views, some have jacuzzis. Extensive breakfasts using local produce are served in an intimate setting downstairs.

3Sixty° Hotel & Suites

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎27525 00501; www.3sixtyhotel.gr; cnr Koletti & Papanikolaou 26; ste incl breakfast €200-250; 🍷🍷) Ascend the spiral staircase beneath the enormous glittering chandelier and you're faced with a handful of sumptuous suites. Each is individually decorated in classic creams, charcoals and browns but features welcome crimson, yellow and even pop-art accents. Oversized beds and bathrooms are top-notch, and breakfast is extensive – hot dishes cooked to order.

Nafplio

📍 Top Sights

- 1 Archaeological Museum C2
2 Palamidi Fortress F4

📍 Sights

- 3 Arvanitia Beach E4
4 Church of Agios Spyridon D3
5 Komboloi Museum D2
6 National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum G2
7 Peloponnese Folklore Foundation Museum D2

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 8 Nafplio Bike G3

📍 Sleeping

- 9 3Sixty° Hotel & Suites D2
10 Adiandi D2
11 Aetoma D3
12 Amymone D2

- 13 Grand Sarai D3
14 Nafplion 1841 C2
15 Pension Eleni C3
16 Pension Marianna D3

🍷 Eating

- 3Sixty° (see 9)
17 Antica Gelateria di Roma C2
18 Carrefour Express E2
19 Mezedopoleio O Noulis E3
20 MitaTo C2
21 Ta Fanaria D2
22 To Omorfo Tavernaki D2

🍷 Drinking & Nightlife

- 23 Es Aei C2
24 O Mavros Gatos D2

🛒 Shopping

- 25 Glykos Peirasmos D3
26 Karonis D2

Eating

Antica Gelateria di Roma GELATERIA €
(☎27520 23520; www.anticagelateria.gr; cnr Farmakopoulou & Komninou; ice cream from €2.50; ☉10am-11pm) The only 'true' gelato shop in Nafplio is still holding back the competition. Italian gelati maestros Marcello, Claudia and Monica Raffo greet you with: '*Bongiorno* - this is an *Italian* gelati shop!' Only natural and local ingredients are used and it's all made on the premises.

Mezedopoleio O Noulis GREEK €
(☎27520 25541; Moutzouridou 22; mezedhes €5-11; ☉lunch & dinner; 🍷) Popular with locals and decked out with prints of ye olde Nafplio, this family-run restaurant does seafood (grilled calamari, battered whitebait) and vegetarian mezedhes particularly well.

Ta Fanaria GREEK €
(☎27520 27141; www.fanaria.gr; Staikopoulou 14; mains €7-15; ☉lunch & dinner; 🍷) This intimate taverna wins points not just for the attentive service but also for its superior selection of vegetarian dishes (think spinach and feta pie, okra stew, oven-baked veggies) alongside the dolmadhes and other Greek classics.

MitaTo KEBAB €
(Staikopoulou 14; mains €3-12; ☉lunch & dinner) A worthy contender for Nafplio's best souvlakia and *gyros* (meat slivers cooked on a vertical rotisserie, eaten with pitta bread), this grilled meat joint has whimsical decor and a meaty menu extensive enough to satisfy most carnivorously inclined clients.

Fougaro CAFE €
(www.fougaro.gr; Asklipiou 98; mains €8-12; ☉6pm-midnight Wed-Sun) Lovely cafe-restaurant and cultural space 3km from Nafplio in a converted canning factory, on the road to Epidavros. Good coffee, light bites for lunch and a smarter dinner menu; particularly good during events. Look for the *fougaro* (chimney).

Carrefour Express SUPERMARKET €
(cnr Sygrou & Flessa; ☉8am-9pm Mon-Sat) Central, reasonably well stocked supermarket.

Faro Taverna SEAFOOD €
(☎27520 27704; Mili; mains €8-15; ☉noon-11pm) Locally famous and well worth the 10-minute drive from Nafplio, this taverna, run by the grandson of the original owner, sits right on Mili Beach. You can't go wrong with the catch of the day, be it freshly grilled squid, red mullet, fresh sardines or anchovies.

To Omorfo Tavernaki GREEK €
(☎27520 25944; Vasilissis Olgas 1; mains €8-15; ☉lunch & dinner; 🍷) Ample servings of homemade delights in a convivial restaurant adorned with antique oddments. The mezedhes plates (zucchini balls, feta with honey, tzatziki etc...) are particularly good.

★3Sixty INTERNATIONAL €€
(☎27525 00501; www.3sixtycafe.gr; Papanikolaou 26 & Koletti; mains €10-19; ☉breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍷🍷) Nafplio punches above its culinary weight at the most imaginative restaurant in town. Sophisticated fare includes the likes of smoky aubergine *imam* with veal, wild mushroom risotto with truffle oil, and lamb stuffed with goat Gruyère. Salads are equally creative. The sultry bar serves potent signature cocktails (we're fans of Legendary Star) and numerous Greek wines.

Drinking & Nightlife

Es Aei WINE BAR
(☎27520 22884; Staikopoulou 8; glass of wine €4.50; ☉3pm-late) Mismatched furniture, bare light bulbs and posters on the walls conjure up a grungy, student hangout image, but the jazz and candlelight transform this joint into something mellower. Sample from an extensive list of Greek wines, accompanied by a succinct selection of excellent tapas.

O Mavros Gatos BAR
(Sofroni 1; ☉8.30am-late) A chilled-out cafe by day, buzzy bar by night, with DJs some nights. There are comfy seats outside and an interior decorated with vintage adverts.

Shopping

Glykos Peirasmos FOOD
(Plapouta 10; ☉10am-9pm) *The* place for delicious chocolate, baklava, *loukoumi* (Turkish delight) and honey-sodden walnut cake.

Karonis WINE
(☎27520 24446; www.karoniswineshop.gr; Amalias 5; ☉8.30am-2.30pm & 6-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Wine enthusiasts can find a fine selection of wines from all over the country, especially Nemean reds and spirits. Wine tastings offered.

Information

Hospital (☎27523 61100; Kountouriotou 1)
National Bank of Greece (Plateia Syntagma-tos) Has ATMs.
Post office (cnr Sygrou & Sidiras Merarhias; ☉7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Staikos Tours (☎27520 27950; Bouboulinas 50; ☎8.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm) Helpful outfit offers Avis rental cars and full travel services.

Tourist police (☎27520 98728; Eleftherias 2)

i Getting There & Away

The **KTEL Argolis bus station** (☎27520 27423; www.ktel-argolidas.gr; Syngrou) has buses to Athens (€13.10, 2½ hours, 11 to 13 daily) via Corinth Isthmus (Peloponnese) KTEL bus station (€6.50, 1½ hours). Other services include the following:

Argos (€1.60, 30 minutes, hourly)

Epidavros (€2.90, 45 minutes, six Monday to Friday, four Saturday, one Sunday)

Galatas (€8.20, two hours, two daily except weekends)

Krandi (€7.70, two hours, four Monday to Friday, three Saturday, one Sunday)

Mycenae (€2.90, one hour, three Monday to Friday, two Saturday)

Tolo (€1.60, 15 minutes, nine to 12 daily)

Tripoli (€6.70, 1½ hours, two daily)

i Getting Around

Call a **taxi** (☎27520 29096) or head to the rank on Sygrou. Car-hire agencies include the following:

Avis (☎27520 24160; www.avis.gr; Bouboulinas 51)

Bounos Rent a Car (☎27520 24390; www.bounos-carrental.com; Sygrou 14)

Hermes Car Rental (☎27520 25308; www.hermestravel.gr; Sygrou 18)

Tiryns

Τίρυνθα

The Mycenaean acropolis of **Tiryns** (☎27520 22657; adult/concession €3/2; ☎8am-7pm), 4km north of Nafplio, is the apogee of Mycenaean architectural achievement. Legend has it that its massive walls, 7m thick in parts, were built by a Cyclops. You can stroll around the immense stonework and explore the Upper and Lower Citadels, but the vaulted passages, the secret stairway and the impressive gallery are off-limits. Any Nafplio-Argos bus can drop you outside the site.

Built in the 13th century BC, this World Heritage site in its heyday was second only to Mycenae in terms of regional importance. The layout of some of the ruins is easy to make out, and there are few crowds. The site has little in the way of signs or descriptions, so it's worth buying *Tiryns* (by Dr Alkestis Papademetriou; €8) at the ticket office.

Epidavros

Επίδαυρος

In its day **Epidavros** (☎27530 22009; adult/concession €6/3; ☎8am-7pm), 30km east of Nafplio, was famed as far away as Rome as a place of miraculous healing. Visitors came great distances to this Sanctuary of Asclepius (god of medicine), set amid pine-clad hills, to seek a cure for their ailments. Today visitors are drawn more to this World Heritage site's remarkably well-preserved theatre, which remains a venue during the Hellenic Festival (p94) for Classical Greek theatre, first performed here up to 2000 years ago.

History

Legend has it that Asclepius was the son of Apollo and Coronis. While giving birth to Asclepius, Coronis was killed by the jealous Apollo, who'd found out that she'd been unfaithful to him. Apollo took his son to Mt Pelion, where the physician centaur Chiron instructed the boy in the healing arts. Asclepius became a healer of such great renown that he brought a man back from the dead, which angered Hades, the god of the underworld, who asked Zeus to strike Asclepius down. Zeus did so, provoking, in turn, the wrath of Apollo, and Asclepius was eventually deified.

Apollo was worshipped at Epidavros in Mycenaean and Archaic times, but by the 4th century BC he had been superseded by his son. Epidavros became acknowledged as the birthplace of Asclepius. Although the afflicted worshipped Asclepius at sanctuaries throughout Greece, the two most important sites were at Epidavros and on the island of Kos. The fame of the Epidavros sanctuary spread, and when a plague raged in Rome, Livy and Ovid came to Epidavros to seek help.

i VISITING EPIDAVROS

If visiting Epidavros on your own by car, follow the signs to Ancient Theatre of Epidavros, and not to P Epidavros (Palaia Epidavros) or A Epidavros (Archaia Epidavros) – the two latter are both signs to the seaside village of Ancient Epidavros. Incidentally, Archaia Epidavros (formerly Palaia Epidavros) is home to the so-called 'small theatre', also used for some Hellenic Festival (p144) performances; the 'large theatre' referred to on festival programs is at the main Epidavros site.

PEREGRINATIONS OF PAUSANIAS

Lonely Planet and its alternatives were beaten to the publishing of guidebooks by nearly 20 centuries. The traveller and geographer Pausanias wrote what is believed to be the first – and most definitive – ‘guidebook’ for tourists in the 2nd century AD. His work, *Description of Greece* (sometimes known as *Tour or Itinerary of Greece*), is a series of 10 volumes in which he describes most of Greece as seen at the time (between AD 143 and 161), covering the regions of Attica, Boeotia, Phocis and Ozolion Locris, plus the regions that make up much of the Peloponnese: Corinthia, Lakonia, Messinia, Elia, Achaia and Arkadia. Classical Greek scholars, historians and archaeologists regard it as an extremely important historical work for its insight into places, people, monuments and sites, as well as associated facts and legends. Pausanias is believed to be from Lydia in Asia Minor and travelled extensively throughout Greece, Macedonia, Italy and parts of Asia and Africa.

It is believed that licks from snakes were one of the curative practices at the sanctuary. Asclepius is normally shown with a serpent, which – by renewing its skin – symbolises rejuvenation. Other treatments provided at the sanctuary involved diet instruction, herbal medicines and occasionally even surgery. The sanctuary also served as an entertainment venue; and every four years, during the Festival of Asclepieia, Epidavros hosted dramas and athletic competitions.

Sights

★ Theatre of Epidavros

HISTORIC SITE

(site adult/concession €6/3; ☉8am-7pm) One of the best-preserved Classical Greek structures in existence, now used for performances of Ancient Greek drama during the annual Hellenic Festival, the 3rd-century BC theatre is the undisputed highlight of Epidavros. It's renowned for its amazing acoustics; a coin dropped in the theatre's centre can be heard from the highest seat. Built of limestone, the theatre seats up to 14,000 people. Its entrance is flanked by restored **Corinthian pilasters** and the foundations of the ancient stage are beyond the circle.

Sanctuary of Asclepius

RUIN

(site adult/concession €6/3; ☉8am-7pm) A short walk from the Theatre of Epidavros, and dotted with pine trees, lie the ruins of the Sanctuary of Asclepius, dedicated to the god of healing. The ruins include the huge **katagogeion**, a hostelry for pilgrims and patients, the large **banquet hall** in which the Romans built an **odeum** (a room for musical performances), and the **stadium** – the venue for the Festival of Asclepieia's athletic competitions. Just beyond is the remarkable **tholos** building, the **Temple of Asclepius** and the **abaton**. You first reach the large, square

katagogeion, beyond which is the former gymnasium-cum-banquet-hall in which the Romans built an odeum. It was here that the Festival of Asclepieia took place.

The path meanders past the remains of the **stadium** on your left. Ahead is the circular **tholos** (built 360–320 BC and under heavy reconstruction at research time), originally surrounded by two circles of columns: Doric and Corinthian. In the centre there used to be a small labyrinth and one of the theories is that patients were put in there for a ‘healing encounter’ with snakes.

To the northeast are the foundations of the **Temple of Asclepius** and next to them is the **abaton**. The therapies practised here seemed to have depended on the influence of the mind upon the body. It is believed that patients were given a pep talk by a priest on the powers of Asclepius, then put to sleep in the abaton to dream of a visitation by the god. The dream would hold the key to the healing process.

East is the **Sanctuary of Egyptian Gods**, which indicates that the cult of Asclepius was an adaptation of the cult of Imhotep, worshipped in Egypt for his healing powers.

Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/concession incl site entry €6/3; ☉8am-7pm) Between the Sanctuary of Asclepius and the Theatre of Epidavros, this museum houses statuary (mostly copies) that once adorned the Temple of Asclepius, stone inscriptions recording miraculous cures, some alarming-looking surgical instruments, votive offerings and fragments of intricately carved reliefs from the ceiling of the sanctuary's **tholos**.

★ Festival & Events

Athens & Epidavros Festival

THEATRE

(☎210 928 2900, 27530 22026; www.greekfestival.gr/en; ☉ Jul & Aug) The Theatre of Epidavros

(p144) stages both modern theatre and Ancient Greek dramas during the annual Athens and Epidavros Festival, part of the larger cultural Hellenic Festival (p94). Tickets can be bought in Epidavros at the theatre box office, online or from Athens' box office (p95). There are special bus services available from Athens (around €25, two hours) and Nafplio (around €10, 45 minutes).

i Getting There & Away

There are buses from Nafplio to Epidavros (€2.90, 45 minutes, six Monday to Friday, four Saturday, one Sunday).

Southwest Argolis

Very few travellers take the time to venture to the southwestern heel of the Argolis peninsula, yet the zigzagging drive (or bike ride) along the east coast, past the pretty coastal town of **Galatas** and a scattering of picturesque houses across the narrow bay that is **Poros**, is absolutely spectacular.

The western part of the peninsula, centred on the agricultural town of **Kranidi**, features the small resorts of **Porto Heli**, 4km south of Kranidi, and **Ermioni**, 4km east of Kranidi. Both offer convenient connections to the Saronic Gulf islands of Hydra and Spetses. Additional Hydra services fly across the water from **Metochi**, essentially a waterfront car park, around 10km east of Ermioni.

Off the main road between Kranidi and Epidavros, 1km west of the village of Didyma, don't miss the **Didyma Caves** **FREE**, two extraordinary sinkholes. The caves collapsed thousands of years ago, leaving large crater-like holes. One hides a tiny Byzantine church, constructed under a crevice.

i Getting There & Away

Regular boat services run to Piraeus via Hydra and Spetses. There are **bus services** (☎ 27540 21237; www.ktel-argolidas.gr) between Kranidi and Nafplio (€7.70, two hours, four on weekdays, three on Saturday, one on Sunday), and local buses from Kranidi to Ermioni (€1.85, 10 minutes, one or two daily) and Porto Heli (€1.85, 10 minutes, one to two daily).

ARKADIA

ΑΡΚΑΔΙΑ

The picturesque rural prefecture of Arkadia occupies much of the central Peloponnese. Its name evokes images of grassy meadows, forested mountains, gurgling streams and shady grottoes. According to mythology, it was a favourite haunt of Pan, the flute-playing, cloven-hooved god of nature.

Almost encircled by mountain ranges, Arkadia was remote enough in ancient times to remain largely untouched by the battles and intrigues of the rest of Greece, and was the only region of the Peloponnese not conquered by the Dorians. The region is dotted with crumbling medieval villages, remote monasteries and Frankish castles, and is popular among fresh-air fiends.

i Getting There & Away

KTEL Arkadia (☎ 27102 22560; www.ktelarkadias.gr; Plateia Kolokotroni) in Tripoli is the departure point for buses to Sternitsa (€5, one hour, one daily Monday to Friday), Dimitsana (€6.50, 1½ hours, one daily) and Andritsena (€8.60, 1½ hours, one daily).

This office also handles buses to Athens (via Corinth Isthmus, €15, up to 14 daily), Olympia (€12.40, one daily), Pyrgos (€14, one daily),

BOAT SERVICES FROM ARGOLIS

Regular **Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 27540 32408; www.hellenicseaways.gr) high-speed boats depart from Porto Heli to Piraeus via Spetses and Hydra, and from Ermioni to Piraeus via Hydra. The cheapest and most frequent boats to Hydra from Argolis are **Hydra Lines** (☎ 22980 52961; www.hydralines.gr; one way/return €6.50/13) from Metochi; park for free by the waterfront or leave your car in a secure, shaded car park (€5). Caiques shuttle between Galatas and Poros (€1, five minutes; €1.50 between midnight and 5am). From Poros there are four daily fast boats to Piraeus (€6.50, 1¼ hours).

DESTINATION	PORT	TIME	FARE	FREQUENCY
Hydra	Ermioni	20-40min	€7.50	3 daily
Hydra	Poros	30min	€12.50	4 daily
Hydra	Metochi	20min	€6.50	6-7 daily
Spetses	Porto Heli	10min	€5.50	3 daily
Spetses	Ermioni	25min	€7.50	2 daily

Nafplio (€6.70, two daily) and Patra (€16.20, one to two daily).

The **bus stop** (📍 27102 42086; www.ktelarkadias.gr; Lagopati, Tripoli) handles departures to Sparta (€5.40, nine daily) and Kalamata (€8.10, two daily on weekdays).

Central Arkadia

To the west of Tripoli is a tangle of precipitous ravines and narrow roads that wind their way through the medieval-village-speckled valleys of the Menalon Mountains. This is the heart of Arkadia, where you'll find some of the most breathtaking mountainous scenery in the Peloponnese, along with some excellent hiking opportunities (and skiing in winter). Having your own wheels is a real boon here, as public transport to the main villages is limited to one or two buses per day.

Stemnitsa

Στεμνίτσα

POP 200

Stemnitsa (stem-*nee*-tsah), 26km northwest of Tripoli, is a striking village of stone houses and Byzantine churches, known for its silver and gold craftsmanship. If you want to peek in any churches, ask around for the keys.

The starting (or finishing) point for the Menalon Trail (p146), Stebnitsa is a good base for hikers.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

★ Mpelleiko

B&B €€

(📍 6976607967, 27950 81286; www.mpelleiko.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast €65/75/85; 📞) The ultrahospitable and knowledgeable English-speaking owner, Nena, has converted her family home (dating from 1650) into a stylish, contempo-

THE MENALON TRAIL

The well-signposted, 72.5km **Menalon Trail** (www.menalontrail.eu) stretches from Stebnitsa to Lagkadia, passing through the dramatic scenery of the Lousios Gorge, the western slopes of Mt Menalon, the Mylaon River valley and the Gortynian Mountains. Completed in May 2015 by a group of volunteers, the trail is divided into eight sections of varying difficulty, the Stebnitsa–Dimitsana leg being the most popular.

The eight trail sections are as follows:

Stemnitsa–Dimitsana (12.5km, 4½ hours) A picturesque descent into the Lousios Gorge past Prodromos Monastery, followed by an ascent to the Old and New Philosophou Monasteries. The trail then follows the course of the river before leading up to the Open Air Water Power Museum. From the Prodromos Monastery there's a worthwhile detour south to Ancient Gortys.

Dimitsana–Zygovisti (4.2km, 1½ hours) A gentle ascent past St Apostoli Monastery, and along footpaths and dirt roads through fields.

Zygovisti–Elati (15km, five hours) This section ascends to the Bilali Pass over the Western Menalon massif, with some steep sections and an optional detour to Pliovouni Peak (1643m).

Elati–Vytina (8.5km, 2¼ hours) Partially paved, wooded trail that passes by some ancient ruins and abandoned windmills.

Vytina–Nymphasia (5.6km, 1½ hours) The trail descends to a short gorge before ascending gently through a rock-and-shrub landscape.

Nymphasia–Magouliana (9km, 3½ hours) Through oak and spruce forests, the trail descends to Kernitsas Monastery and passes by Sfyrida Hermitage and Gavros Spring.

Magouliana–Valtesiniko (7.5km, two hours) The path descends past an old sanatorium and follows a riverbed.

Valtesiniko–Lagkadia (13.9km, five hours) The path ascends to a Byzantine fortress, then passes through open country and traverses valleys before ending at a war memorial.

You can download the excellent digital app **Menalon Trail topoGuide** for detailed offline maps and numerous points of interest. If you're not digitally inclined, the Anavasi Topo25 *Lousios 8.51; 1:22,000* map is very handy for the Lousios Gorge section and the surrounding villages.

Of the villages, Stebnitsa, Dimitsana, Valtesiniko and Lagkadia all have places to stay and eat, and you can pick up provisions at Vytina, Nymphasia and Magouliana.

rary guesthouse perched above the village. You can even sleep in the former 'donkey basement'. Breakfast includes homemade organic produce and is served in a beautiful room with an open fireplace.

Xenonas Tsarbou

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎ 27950 81406; www.xenonas-tsarbou.gr; d incl breakfast from €60; 📄 📞) This delightful guesthouse is a happy merging of a converted historic stone building with contemporary decor; its compact rooms trimmed with gold and velvet. There's a cosy bar with fireplace for post-hike relaxation, and hospitable hostess Christina prepares an extensive breakfast spread.

Gerousia

GREEK €

(mains €7-12; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A dining establishment since 1870, this appealing cafe on the square is a good place to linger over a coffee, glass of wine or an assortment of traditional Greek dishes.

📍 Getting There & Away

There is one bus in each direction on weekdays between Tripoli and Dimitsana via Stemnitsa (€4.10, one hour). A taxi to Dimitsana costs around €10, to Prodromos Monastery €15, to Ancient Gortys €25 and to the Philosophou Monasteries €20.

Dimitsana

Διμήτσάνα

POP 340

Built amphitheatrically on two hills at the beginning of the Lousios Gorge, Dimitsana, 11km north of Stemnitsa, is a delightful medieval village. This small place played a significant role in the country's struggle for self-determination. Its Greek school, founded in 1764, was an important spawning ground for the ideas leading to the uprisings against the Turks. Its students included Bishop Germanos of Patra and Patriarch Gregory V, who was hanged by the Turks in retaliation for the massacre in Tripoli. The village also had a number of gunpowder factories and a branch of the secret Filiki Eteria (Friendly Society), where Greeks met to discuss the revolution. Today, this sleepy village is hiker central in summer and full of skiing weekenders in winter.

👁 Sights & Activities

Open Air Water Power Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 27950 31630; www.piop.gr; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☺ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) This excellent little museum is an entertaining romp

through the region's pre-industrial past. It occupies the old Agios Yiannis mill complex, 1.6km south of town (signposted), where a spring-fed stream once supplied power for a succession of mills spread down the hillside. The lush grounds are criss-crossed with channels alive with rushing water that power the fully operational fulling mill, flour mill and gunpowder mill, the last having provided ammunition during the Greek War of Independence.

Trekking Hellas

OUTDOORS

(☎ 27910 25978, 6974459753; www.trekkinghellas.gr) Trekking Hellas offers various activities, including white-water rafting (€50 to €80) on the Lousios River and half-day guided treks along the Lousios Gorge (€20 to €50). Contact them in advance.

🛏 Sleeping

Kazakou Guesthouse

B&B €

(☎ 27950 31660; www.xenonaskazakou.gr; d/tr incl breakfast €51/60; 📄 📞) This rambling stone house above central Dimitsana features spacious rooms with wooden floors, a vast breakfast served in the vaulted lounge and friendly owners. Wi-fi only works in the lounge and the location is either a boon or a bane, depending on whether you enjoy the sound of church bells.

★ Amanites

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎ 27950 31090; www.amanites.gr; d/studio incl breakfast €65/80; 📄 📞) This lovely place, a converted historic home, has seven elegant rooms with heavy drapes and tasteful fabrics. Four rooms have front-facing balconies overlooking the gorge; others have kitchenettes. Delightful English-speaking owner Panos goes out of his way to be helpful.

Enastron Guesthouse

B&B €€

(☎ 27950 31684; www.xenonasenastron.gr; d incl breakfast €65; 📄 📞) This appealing guesthouse is distinguished not just by the friendliness of and helpfulness of its owners, but also by the meticulous attention to detail. The spacious wooden-beamed rooms come with contemporary fittings and excellent bathrooms, and the extensive breakfast buffet comprises fresh local produce.

🍴 Eating & Drinking

Most of the village tavernas serve typical mountain fare, such as game casseroles or roasts, rooster in red wine and *fasoladha* (bean soup).

WORTH A TRIP

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SOJOURN

Zerzova (☎ 27950 31753, 6932847358; Panaghia; mains €7-15; 🍴 lunch & dinner Fri-Mon Sep-May; 🍷), a tiny eatery 14km southwest of Dimitsana in the village of Panaghia, ticks all the right boxes. Sustainable practices? Tick – the husband-and-wife team collect all wild herbs and cultivate their own produce. Home cooking? Tick – even Greek grandmothers are happy to come here. Traditional? Tick again – it's in a lovely old building with a cellar below.

Me Meraki

PIZZA €

(☎ 27950 31113; pizza from €7; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Affable Chicago transplant Maria has returned to her mother's home village and opened a pizza parlour. Come here for satisfying homemade pizza and the lowdown on Dimitsana.

To Kapilio Ton Athonaton

STEAK €€

(mains €5-18; 🍴 lunch & dinner Thu-Tues) The summer terrace overlooking the gorge, this place is sought out by discerning carnivores for its meaty specials – roast lamb, pork chops, locally made sausage...

Kato Apo To Roloi

WINE BAR

(glass of wine €3; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) The 'Under the Clock' cafe is *the* spot to unwind after a day's hiking. Look down at the gorge with a large glass of wine or an expertly mixed cocktail (€7.50) in hand.

i Getting There & Around

There is one daily bus in each direction on weekdays between Tripoli and Dimitsana (€5, 1½ hours). A taxi to Sternitsa costs around €10, to Monastery of Philosophou €15 and to Ancient Gortys €25.

Kynouria**Κυνουρία**

Kynouria is the coastal region of Arkadia. It covers a narrow strip of territory that stretches south from the tiny village of Kiveri, 41km east of Tripoli, to Kosmas, perched high in the Parnonas Mountains. Much of the land is incredibly rugged, with a narrow coastal plain and very little fertile ground.

In ancient times the region was contested by Argos and Sparta – the Argives held sway in the north and the Spartans in the south.

Leonidio to Geraki

The drive (or bike ride) from **Leonidio**, 76km south of Argos, over the Parnonas Mountains to the village of Geraki in Lakonia, 48km away, is one of the most scenic in the Peloponnese. An archetypal white-washed village, Leonidio is dramatically situated at the mouth of the **Badron Gorge**, with sheer red cliffs looming above it.

For the first 12km, the road snakes west up the Badron Gorge, climbing slowly away from the river until at times the water is no more than a silver ribbon far below. The road then leaves the Badron and climbs rapidly towards Kosmas on dramatic hairpin bends.

Just before the top of the climb, there's a road to the left leading to **Moni Panagias Elonis**, a monastery perched precariously on the mountainside.

It's another 14km up from the monastery to the peaceful mountain village of **Kosmas**. It makes an ideal rest stop: you can admire the stone cathedral or try the town speciality (goat) at one of the tavernas beneath the huge plane trees. After Kosmas the road gently descends to the village of **Geraki**, where you can check out the appealing churches before heading 40km west to Sparta, or continuing south to Monemvasia.

Note to cyclists: this route is even more dramatic (and easier on the muscles) if done in reverse order.

LAKONIA**ΛΑΚΩΝΙΑ**

The region of Lakonia occupies almost identical boundaries to the powerful mountain-skirted kingdom ruled by King Menelaus in Mycenaean times. It is home to legends, including the city of Sparta and the spectacular ruins of Mystras, the Byzantine Empire's last stronghold. Dominating the landscape are two massive mountain ranges, the Taÿgetos Mountains in the west and the Parnonas Mountains in the east. These taper away to create the central and eastern fingers of the Peloponnese.

English speakers can thank the Lakonians for the word 'laconic'.

Sparta

POP 16,200

Σπάρτη

Sparta, fearing no one, was without city walls or fortification, which is probably why so few traces are left of a remarkable people.

At the height of their power, Greece's toughest, incorruptible, legendary warriors triumphed over Athens and the rest of Greece in the Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BC). However, the decisive defeat by the Thebans in the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC was the beginning of the end for Sparta, which was followed by successive subjugation by the Macedonians, Romans, Goths and Slavs.

The town was refounded in AD 1834 on the orders of King Otto. Mindful of history, Otto and his court felt that since Athens was to be rebuilt to reflect its former glory, so too should Sparta. He didn't succeed, though a few ruins attest to its ancient pre-eminence. Most visitors pass through on their way to and from the Byzantine glories of Mystras.

👁️ Sights

★ Museum of the Olive & Greek Olive Oil

MUSEUM

(📍27310 89315; www.piop.gr; Othonos Amalias 129; adult/concession €3/1.50; 🕒10am–6pm Wed–Mon) This beautifully designed museum initiates you into the mysteries of the olive from its initial appearance in the Mediterranean in 60,000 BC to the present day. Learn

about its immense importance in millenia of Greek life. Immerse yourself in olive oil's many uses (cooking, fuel, ritual, perfume-making). Check out the magnificent reconstructions of olive presses in the courtyard, ranging from prehistoric to Byzantine. Finally, marvel at the minute working models (press the button!) that demonstrate changes in pressing technology.

Ancient Sparta

RUIN

Few buildings dating back to the height of Sparta's greatness have been left standing. Still it's worthwhile to wander to the north end of town to see the ruined theatre and the **Sanctuary of Athena Halkioitou** against the backdrop of the snowcapped Taygetos Mountains, as well as the **Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia** on the northern outskirts of Sparta. To get here, head to the **King Leonidas statue** that belligerently hefts its sword and shield at the northern end of Paleologou. When the Persians attacked Sparta and told them to lay down their weapons, the Spartans' response, immortalised beneath Leonidas' feet, was *'Molon labe'* (Come and get them). West of here, signs point the way to the acropolis.

GROWING UP SPARTAN

Maybe you saw the gory but brilliant film *300*, imaginatively based on the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, one of the most talked about battles in history. Three hundred elite Spartan soldiers held an entire Persian army (whose force numbered several thousand) at bay at the pass ('hot gates') of Thermopylae (near today's Lamia). For three days, wave upon wave of Persian soldiers fell upon their deadly spears and unbridgeable tortoise-shell formation. What kind of soldiers could display such bravery? Ones raised in Sparta, where warfare was held to be the only occupation worthy of its men and where warriors embodied ferocious, self-sacrificing martial supremacy, living (and very often dying) by the motto 'return with your shield or on it'.

If you were born male and deemed too weak and feeble to make it to adulthood, you would be left on the slopes of the Taygetos Mountains to die. Passed the first round? Then at the age of seven, you'd be plucked from the bosom of your family and sent to live in barracks with other boys, to undergo the military education system known as *agoge*, designed to build physical and emotional toughness. You'd be habitually underfed to encourage you to survive by living off the land and by stealing, but punished harshly if caught. You'd undergo brutal institutionalised beatings, which you'd be expected to bear without showing pain. At the age of 12, you'd form a sexual bond with an older mentor, who'd be responsible for your training. Upon turning 18, you'd become a member of the army until the age of 30, when you'd finally be granted Spartan citizenship, if you had proved yourself worthy.

Born a girl? Then you'd be better off than anywhere else in Greece at the time. You would eat the same food as your brothers, participate in sport and exercise nude. You'd be well educated and literate, and forbidden to marry until in your early 20s, which would spare you from teenage pregnancies and miscarriages. Then when you finally did marry, your husband-to-be would 'abduct' you, and you'd have your head shaved and be dressed in men's clothing before the marriage could be consummated. (That'd be to make your husband comfortable, since he wouldn't have spent much time around women.)

From the main cobbled road, a footpath runs left (west) through olive groves to the 2nd- or 3rd-century-BC **ancient theatre**, a few steps and seats of which are still visible along the overgrown half-circle.

The main road leads north to the fenced-off acropolis, passing the Byzantine **Church of Christ the Saviour** on the way to the 6000 BC Sanctuary of Athena Halkioutou on a small hillock. Some of the most important finds in the town's archaeological museum were unearthed here.

If you follow the Tripoli-bound road north of town, a signposted path leads downhill to the remains of the **Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia**; this is where Spartan boys were flogged, the bravest awarded bronze sickles that they dedicated to the goddess.

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(📍 27310 28575; cnr Lykourgou & Agiou Nikonos; adult €2; ☀️ 8am-3pm Tue-Sun) Sparta's old-style archaeological museum hosts artefacts from

Sparta's illustrious past, many unlabelled and most without any protective covering. You may spot a votive sickle of the kind that Spartan boys dedicated to Artemis Orthia, reliefs featuring Helen and Menelaus (and Helen with Paris), bronze and lead votive figurines, heads and torsos of various deities, a statue thought to be King Leonidas, votive terracotta masks and grave stelae. Fine mosaics from Hellenistic and Roman Sparta are also on show.



Activities

Spartathlon

SPORTS

(www.spartathlon.gr; ☀️ Sep) This gruelling annual foot race takes place over the 246km between Athens and Sparta. It follows in the footsteps of Pheidippides, the messenger who ran from Athens to Sparta in one day in 490 BC, to ask for the Spartans' assistance in the battle of Marathon against the Persians. The record currently stands at 20 hours and 25 minutes.

Sparta

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles



Sleeping & Eating

The closest campgrounds are 2km from central Sparta, near Mystras village.

Hotel Lakonia

HOTEL €

(☎ 27310 28951; www.lakoniahotel.gr; Palaeologou 89; s/d incl breakfast €40/55; 🏠 📺) The rooms at the Lakonia are not hugely memorable, but far from spartan nonetheless. Boons include a supercentral location and double-glazed windows that cut out street noise, and the service is friendly and helpful.

Hotel Maniatis

HOTEL €

(☎ 27310 22665; www.maniatishotel.gr; Paleologou 72-76; s/d incl breakfast €44/60; 🏠 📺) Light and pleasant rooms with firm beds and more designer shapes than an NYC contemporary-design exhibition. The service is efficient and the upmarket **Zeys** restaurant (mains €8 to €17) is attached.

Kápari

MEDITERRANEAN €€

(☎ 27313 00520; www.kaparirestaurant.gr; Gortsoglou 77; mains €8-15; ☀️ noon-11pm) This homey, friendly restaurant is a cut above Sparta's largely uninspiring taverna scene. Greek standards are present and correct, but there are also lovely salads, pastas and an extensive seafood menu; shrimp *sagana-ki* (prawns in a savoury tomato sauce with cheese) stands out.

Dionysos Garden

GREEK €€

(☎ 27310 25050; mains €7-18; ☀️ lunch daily, dinner Tue-Sat; 📺) Around 1.2km on the road to Mystras, this tranquil restaurant is appropriately festooned with greenery. There may be a shortage of frolicking nymphs and satyrs, but you will find a large selection of well-executed Greek standards.

Information

National Bank of Greece (cnr Paleologou & Dioskouron)

Police (☎ 27310 89580; Episkopou Vresthenis 18)

Post office (Archidamou 10; ☀️ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Revanche Internet Cafe (Gortsologou 51; per hr €2; ☀️ 9am-late)

Sparta Tourism (☎ 27310 28166; www.sparti.gr; Evangelistrias 83-91; ☀️ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Getting There & Away

Sparta's **KTEL Lakonia bus station** (☎ 27310 26441; www.ktel-lakonias.gr; cnr Lykourgou & Thivronos) has buses to Athens (€19.50, 3¼ hours, seven to nine daily) via Corinth (two

hours), and buses to Gythio (€4.30, one hour, six daily), Neapoli (€14.20, three hours, three daily), Tripoli (€5.40, one hour, nine daily) and Monemvasia (€10, two hours, four daily).

Buses run to Mystras (€1.60, 15 minutes, three daily) from the stop next to the OTE building on Lykourgou; a taxi costs around €10.

Travelling to Kalamata (€3.20, one hour, one to two daily) involves changing buses at Artemisia (€3.20, 40 minutes) on the Messinian side of the Langada Pass.

Departures to the Mani peninsula include buses to Gerolimenas (€10.30, 2¼ hours, three daily), Areopoli (€6.90, two hours, three daily) and a 9am service to the Diros Caves (€8); the return times change.

Mystras

Μυστράς

The captivating ruins of churches, libraries, strongholds and palaces in the fortress town of Mystras (miss-*trahss*), a World Heritage-listed site, spill from a spur of the Taygetos Mountains 7km west of Sparta. It's among the most important historical sites in the Peloponnese. This is where the Byzantine Empire's richly artistic and intellectual culture made its last stand before an invading Ottoman army, almost 1000 years after its foundation.

Traveller facilities are split between Mystras village, 1km or so below the main gate of ancient Mystras, and Pikoulionika village, 800m from Mystras' fortress gate.

History

The Frankish leader Guillaume de Villehardouin built the fortress in 1249. When the Byzantines won back the Morea from the Franks, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos made Mystras its capital and seat of government. Settlers from the surrounding plains began to move here, seeking refuge from the invading Slavs. From this time until Dimitrios surrendered to the Turks in 1460, a despot of Morea (usually a son or brother of the ruling Byzantine emperor) lived and reigned at Mystras.

While the empire plunged into decline elsewhere, Mystras enjoyed a renaissance. Gemistos Plethon (1355-1452) founded a school of humanistic philosophy here and his enlightened ideas, including the revival of the teachings of Plato and Pythagoras, attracted intellectuals from all corners of Byzantium. Art and architecture also flourished, as seen in the town's splendid buildings and frescoes.

Mystras declined under Ottoman rule, but thrived again after the Venetians captured it in 1687 and developed a flourishing silk industry. The population swelled to 40,000. The Turks recaptured the town in 1715 and from then it was downhill all the way; the Russians burnt it in 1770, as did the Albanians in 1780, and Ibrahim Pasha torched what was left in 1825. By the time of Independence it was a largely abandoned ruin. Much restoration has taken place since the 1950s (and continues to this day) and in 1989 it was declared a Unesco World Heritage site.

👁 Sights

★ Mystras

RUIN
 (📍 23315 25363; adult/concession €5/3; 🕒 8am–8pm) Spread over a steep, verdant mountainside of the Taygetos ranges, this former capital of the Byzantine Empire is the single most compelling set of medieval ruins in Greece. A classic fortified city, Mystras is surrounded by verdant olive and orange trees.

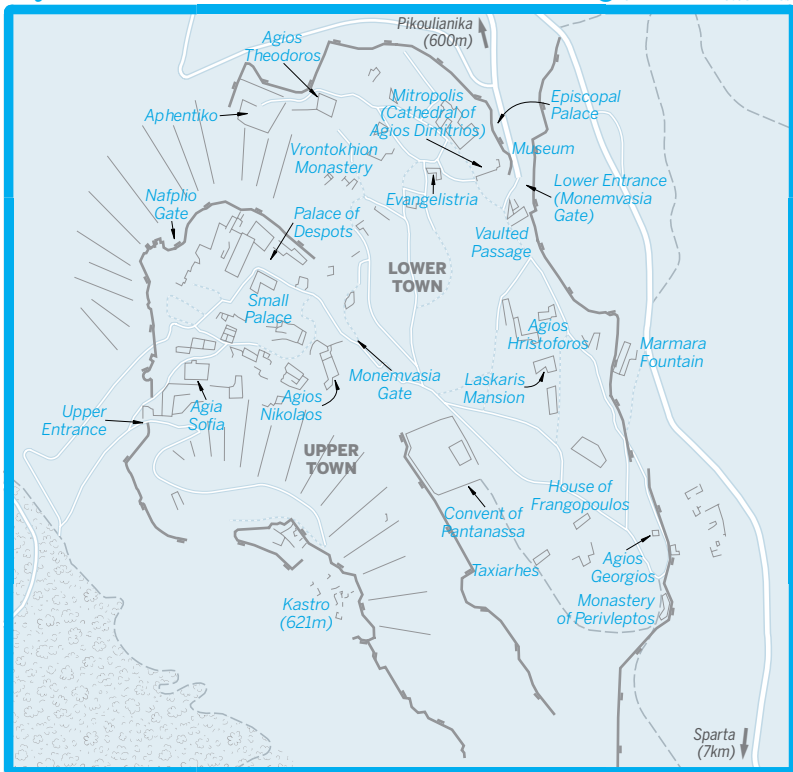
Treading the cobblestones, worn smooth by centuries of footsteps, you can walk with the ghosts, ducking into the ruins of palaces, monasteries and churches, most dating from between 1271 and 1460.

From the **upper-entrance** ticket office, the right-hand path (signposted 'Castle') leads up to the fortress; it's a 10-minute ascent. The fortress was built by the Franks and extended by the Turks; the views of the Lakonia plain, spread out below, are nothing short of fantastic. The left-hand path descends from the ticket office to **Agia Sofia**, which served as the palace church and burial ground for several emperors' wives; some frescoes survive in a side chapel. Steps descend from here to a T-junction.

A left turn leads to the **Nafplio Gate**. Near the gate is the huge **Palace of Despots**, largely restored but closed to the public at the time of writing. The complex was started by the Franks and finished by the Byzantines; various buildings were con-

Mystras

0 100 m
 0 0.05 miles



structed between 1250 and 1450 and the main palace between 1350 and 1400.

The right fork leads down to the **Monemvasia Gate**, the entrance to the lower town. Through the gate, turn right to reach the 14th-century **Convent of Pantanassa**. This features a beautifully ornate stone-carved facade and is still maintained by nuns, Mystras' only inhabitants besides the motley crew of stray cats. The convent is an elaborate, perfectly proportioned building that's never overstated. The exquisite, richly coloured 15th-century frescoes here are among the finest examples of late-Byzantine art. Look out for the tiny stamped silver and gold votive offerings beneath the large icon of the Virgin. You'll find images of eyes, ears, legs, arms, breasts, babies, husbands and wives stamped onto these small tablets, depending on the problems (health or personal life) for which the faithful are hoping for supernatural help. The nuns ask that, before entering, you cover bare legs with the cloths provided.

The path continues down to the **Monastery of Perivleptos**, which is built into a rock and tucked away in a pine grove. Inside, the 14th-century frescoes, preserved virtually intact, equal those of Pantanassa. The church has a very high dome and in the centre you'll find the Pantokrator (the Byzantine depiction of Christ as the universal, all-powerful ruler) surrounded by the Apostles, and the Virgin flanked by two angels.

Continue down towards the Mitropolis and you'll pass **Agios Georgios**, one of Mystras' many private chapels. Further down, and above the path on the left, is the **Laskaris Mansion**, a typical Byzantine house.

The **Mitropolis (Cathedral of Agios Dimitrios)** is a complex of buildings enclosed by a high wall. The original church was built in the 1200s, but was greatly altered in the 15th century. The church stands in an attractive courtyard surrounded by stoa and balconies. Its impressive ecclesiastical ornaments and furniture include a marble iconostasis, an intricately carved wooden throne, and a marble slab in the floor featuring a two-headed eagle (the symbol of Byzantium) located on the exact site where Emperor Constantine XI was crowned. The church also has some fine frescoes. Exhibits at the small but modern museum upstairs include fragments of ancient cloth, buttons, jewellery and other everyday items of Mystras' inhabitants.

Beyond the Mitropolis is the **Vrontokhion Monastery**. This was once the wealth-

TACKLING MYSTRAS

At least three hours are needed to do justice to the ruins of Mystras. Start early in the morning to beat the tour groups; wear sensible shoes; and bring water (you can refill at the monastery). The site is divided into two interconnected sections – the *kastro* (the fortress on the summit) and the *hora* (upper town), accessible from the fortress gate; and the *kato hora* (lower town), accessible via the main gate.

If you don't have your own wheels, it makes sense to catch a taxi to the fortress gate and walk down. If you do have a car, it's best to cover the lower town first (as it has the lion's share of attractions) from the main gate and then head up to the fortress gate to visit the fortress and the upper town ruins. You can use the same ticket to re-enter at either entrance.

iest monastery of Mystras, the focus of cultural activities and the burial place of the despots. Of its two churches, **Agios Theodoros** and **Aphentiko**, the latter is the more impressive, with striking frescoes.

Sleeping & Eating

There are some upmarket guesthouses around the village of Mystras and further out. Pikouliatika is an equally good village at which to base yourself, and it has better eating options than Mystras.

Mystras Castle Town

APARTMENT €

(📍) 27310 20047; www.mystras-castle-town.com; d/tr/q €45/50/55; (📞) Run by a friendly Russian-Greek couple, these compact, fully equipped apartments are excellent value and just a stone's throw from Mystras' main square. Balconies look out onto the Mystras ruins, and the owners can provide a full breakfast (€4 per person). Wi-fi comes and goes like a stray cat.

Castle View

CAMPGROUND €

(📍) 27310 83303; www.castleview.gr; camp sites per adult/tent/car €6/4/4, 2-person bungalow €25; ☀️ Apr-Oct; (📞) This recently renovated campground, set among olive trees, features a restaurant, pool and hot showers. Owners are happy to give tips on hiking in the Taygetos Mountains. It's about 1km before Nea Mystras village.

WORTH A TRIP

LANGADA PASS

ΟΡΕΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΒΑΣΗ ΛΑΓΚΑΔΑ

If you have time and your own wheels, the 59km Sparta–Kalamata road is one of the most stunning, if time consuming and winding, routes in Greece. The road crosses the Taygetos Mountains by way of the Langada Pass.

The climb begins in earnest at the village of **Trypi**, 9km west of Sparta, where the road enters the dramatic **Langada Gorge**. To the north of this gorge is the site where the ancient Spartans left to die those babies too weak or deformed to become good soldiers.

The road then follows the course of the Langada River before climbing sharply through a series of hairpin bends, fringed with plane trees and pines, to emerge in a sheltered valley. This is a good spot to stop for a stroll among the plane trees along the riverbank. The road then climbs steeply once more, to the high point of 1524m, crossing the boundary from Lakonia into Messinia on the way. The descent to Kalamata is equally dramatic.

★ Traditional Guesthouse Mazaraki

GUESTHOUSE €€

(☎ 27310 20414; www.xenonasmazaraki.gr; Poukoulanika; d/ste incl breakfast €95/125; 📞) 🍴

By far the most original accommodation for miles around, Mazaraki consists of three beautiful houses divided into individually decorated studios and apartments. Breakfast arrives on your doorstep in a basket, with produce from the owners' organic farm. The welcoming owners are happy to advise about hiking and biking in the area (and to lend you mountain bikes).

Taverna Pikoulanika

GREEK €€

(☎ 27310 82403; Poukoulanika; mains €5-9; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The convivial owner welcomes you on the terrace with delicious, homemade meatballs, garlicky aubergine 'caviar', rabbit stew and other classic dishes. You may get a hefty slice of drizzle cake on the house even if you don't order dessert.

📍 Getting There & Away

From Sparta, buses run to Mystras (€1.60, 15 minutes) daily at 7am, noon and 4pm; return trips depart around 7.15am, 12.15pm and 4.15pm. A taxi between Sparta and Mystras costs around €10.

Monemvasia Μονεμβασιά

Surrounded by the teal waters of the Aegean Sea, vast, imposing Monemvasia (moh-nem-vah-sia) is an iceberg-like slab of rock, with sheer cliffs rising hundreds of metres from the sea, linked to the mainland by a single, highly defensible causeway.

These days Monemvasia incorporates both the rock, with its medieval village enclosed within the walls of its *kastró* (fort), and the modern mainland village of Ge-

fyra, just across the causeway. 'You can find everything you want in this city – except water', observed an 18th-century Turkish traveller. Remarkably – given that for most of its existence Monemvasia's only source of drinking water came from the sky – Monemvasia has remained inhabited to this day, unlike its Byzantine contemporary, Mystras. Only 12 people live in the *kastró* permanently, however; the rest go home to Gefyra after a day's work. In spite of Monemvasia's immense popularity, the extraordinary visual impact of the medieval village – and the delights of exploring it – override the effects of mass tourism in summer.

Cross the causeway and follow the curving road that skirts the cliff to the official entrance, a narrow tunnel in a massive fortifying wall. The tunnel is L-shaped, so the magical town is concealed until you emerge on the other side.

History

The rock island of Monemvasia was part of the mainland until it was cut off by an earthquake in AD 375. Its name means 'single entry' (*moni* – single, *emvasia* – entry), as there is only one way into the town.

During the 6th century, barbarian incursions forced inhabitants of the surrounding area to retreat to this natural rock fortress, where they founded the upper town that eventually spread downwards. By the 13th century, if Mystras was the spiritual centre of the Byzantine Empire, then Monemvasia was one of its biggest trade centres. It was famous throughout Europe for its highly praised *malvasia*-grape Malmsey wine; George, Duke of Clarence, in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, drowned in a barrel of the stuff.

Monemvasia changed hands several times as the Franks, Venetians and Ottoman Turks all invaded in the following centu-

ries, each adding their own elements to the architectural melange. During the War of Independence its Turkish inhabitants were massacred after their surrender, following a three-month siege; the fortress remained impregnable to the end, its only weakness being the food supply.

Falling into obscurity by the 18th century, Monemvasia was revived as a luxury destination in the 1970s.

Sights



★Kastro – Medieval Town HISTORIC SITE
Almost wholly surrounded by ocean, Monemvasia's fortified medieval village is divided into the **lower town**, bisected by a main cobbled street lined with souvenir shops and tavernas that leads to the main square, and the **upper town**, with its ruins and **fortress**. The greatest pleasure of visiting the *kastro* comes from wandering the labyrinth: exploring the tiny alleyways and winding stairways that weave between a complex network of stone houses, and ducking into atmospheric nooks and crannies.

In the lower town, the central square is dominated by the **Cathedral of Christos Elkomenos**, dating from the 13th century. Head up through the stone archway opposite the bell tower and you come across the handsome 17th-century **Church of Myrtidiotissa**. Down near the waterfront fortifications is the whitewashed 16th-century **Church of Panagia Chrysaftissa**.

The path to the fortress and the upper town is signposted off the main street in several locations. A walking path skirts the edge of the upper-town ruins all the way to just above the main gate, affording great views of Monemvasia's cluster of rooftops against a cliff backdrop. The upper town's extensive ruins were undergoing intensive restoration at the time of research but its paths should reopen in 2016. Don't miss the **Church of Agia Sofia**, which perches on the edge of a sheer cliff, and mind you don't fall down the overgrown cisterns.

Monemvasia Archaeological Collection

MUSEUM

( 27320 61403; adult/concession €2/1;  8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) This small museum housed in a former temple displays finds unearthed in the course of old town excavations, such as pottery from Asia Minor, cementing Monemvasia's status as an important trading post. The star turn is the **templon** (chancel screen) from an 11th-century church. Other objects of note in-

clude a marble door frame from the Church of Agia Sofia, coats of arms (the trend introduced by Frankish invaders) and well-heads of ancient cisterns.

Sleeping

There's no budget accommodation in the *kastro* itself; accommodation is cheaper in Gefyra. Prices fluctuate drastically depending on supply and demand. In November and February Monemvasia pretty much shuts down. A torch (flashlight) is a good idea for those staying in the cobbled, dimly lit *kastro*.



Flower of Monemvasia

HOTEL €

( 27320 61395; www.flower-hotel.gr; Gefyra; d €42-55, tr €54-70, ste €84, all incl breakfast;   Located in mainland Gefyra, opposite Monemvasia's *kastro*, this clean, modern spot is a far cry from the region's more traditional offerings. Nearly all 20 rooms have sea views and some have kitchenettes. Staff are very helpful.



Hotel Filoxenia

HOTEL €

( 27320 61716; www.filoxenia-monemvasia.gr; d/tr €53/66;   Spotless cheapie off Gefyra's main street, with views of the Monemvasia rock from its balconies. Breakfast €5.




Hotel Byzantino

HOTEL €€

( 27320 61351; www.hotelbyzantino.com; Monemvasia; d €55-110, tr €90-115, q €125;   This range of atmospheric rooms offers a great experience of the traditional *kastro*; rooms occupy around five different buildings and come in varying shapes, sizes and prices (from cheaper rooms with no views to smarter digs with sea-facing balconies and vaulted stone ceilings); most are decked out in antiques. Extensive Greek breakfast costs €6. Wi-fi in lounge only.

Malvasia Traditional Hotel

HOTEL €€

( 27320 61160; www.malvasiahotel-traditional.gr; d/tr/q incl breakfast from €65/120/160;   One of Monemvasia's oldest and most established hotels makes the most of traditional architecture. Its renovated rooms feature heavy wooden beams, light, bright colour schemes and contemporary art; some are cosy, cave-like nooks with vaulted stone ceilings. The pricier rooms come with sea views; some have balconies overlooking the water. Wi-fi in lobby only.

★Moni Emvasis Luxury Suites

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

( 27320 62022; www.moniemvasis.gr; ste incl breakfast €240-340;   Consisting of just

three individually conceived suites, Moni Emvasis doesn't hold back with luxurious touches, from rainshowers and jacuzzis to oversized, sumptuous beds. The sea views from the balconies of the Junior and the Deluxe suites are the best, but the Moni Emvasis suite has a decadent, medieval ambience with its vaulted ceilings and marble fireplace. Extensive breakfast showcases local produce.

Eating & Drinking

Self-caterers will find most things at the Lefkakis supermarket, just past the post office in Gefyra. Tavernas on Monemvasia's main street all serve similar fare.

Matoula

TAVERNA €

(☎27320 61660; mains €8-13) Of all the tavernas on the main street, Matoula is the oldest, has the best sea views from its vine-trellis-shaded terrace, and serves a reliable selection of classic dishes including dolmadhes, grilled calamari and courgette fritters. All but the veggie dishes are a big hit with the local cats, too.

★ Chrisovoulo

INTERNATIONAL €€€

(☎27320 62022; www.chrisovoulo.gr; mains €14-30; 🍷) Monemvasia's most imaginative restaurant by far, Chrisovoulo conjures up the likes of quinoa salad, veal with morel sauce and risotto with *siglino* pork from the Mani, all with equal ease and flair. The service is professional, the sea views fantastic and there's a serious local wine list to boot. The three-course dinner menu is a steal at €25.

WORTH A TRIP

THE CAVE OF KASTANIA ΣΠΗΛΑΙΟ ΚΑΣΤΑΝΙΑ

The extraordinary **Kastania Cave** (☎27343 60100; www.monemvasia.gr; adult/concession €7/3; ☀10am-4pm Sat & Sun, additional seasonal dates), located at the end of a spectacularly winding 17km route northeast of Neapoli, contains some of the best examples of rare stalactites and stalagmites in Europe, estimated to be around 3 million years old. Guided tours in English depart hourly; as you walk around a raised and lit 3km circuit, guides are quick to point out octopi, exotic plants and otherworldly creatures cast in stone. Call ahead to double-check opening times.

★ Wine Tasting Kamara

WINE BAR

(☎6972319434, 27320 61704; glass of wine €3; ☀noon-late) During your perambulations, you may stumble across this enchanting 11th-century wine cellar. The home of Byron and Vivienne, its walls are decorated with eclecticia from a lifetime's travels. Get talking to the gregarious retired owners over a glass or two of Greek wine, and you may not want to leave. Follow the 'wine tasting' signs towards the waterfront.

Information

ATMs, the **post office** (☀7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri), **police** (☎27320 61210; Spartis 137) and the supermarket are all located in Gefyra. **Malvasia Travel** (☎27320 61752; ☀7.30am-2.30pm & 5.15-8pm Mon-Sat) in Gefyra sells tickets for ferries.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from outside Malvasia Travel (p156) just over the causeway in Gefyra. There are buses to Athens (€30, six hours, at least four daily) via Sparta (€10, 2½ hours), Tripoli (€15.50, 3½ hours) and Corinth Isthmus (€23, 4½ hours).

Getting Around

The medieval *kastro* of Monemvasia is pedestrian only, but cars and motorcycles can cross the causeway. Parking is available on the left-hand side of the narrow road skirting the rock. Alternatively, park in the waterfront car park in Gefyra.

A **shuttle bus** (€1; ☀8am-midnight) ferries visitors between Gefyra and the *kastro* every 30 minutes.

Neapoli

Νεάπολη

POP 2730

Neapoli (neh-ah-po-lih), close to the southern tip of the eastern prong of the Peloponnese, is the departure point for the Ionian Island of Kythira, clearly visible across the bay. You also pass through Neapoli to see the Kastania Cave.

From March to December, a daily ferry runs between Neapoli and Diakofti on Kythira (€11/44 per person/car, 1¼ hours). Tickets are sold at **Vatika Bay Shipping Agency** (☎27340 24004; www.vatikabay.gr; ☀9am-9pm summer, 2 hours before departure rest of year), 350m before the small bridge. Leave plenty of time to find the place and buy the ticket.

KTEL (☎27340 23222; www.ktel-lakonias.gr) has buses from Neapoli to Athens (€33.70, three daily) via Sparta (€14.20, three hours)

and Molai (€7, 1¼ hours). Change in Molai for Monemvasia.

Nearby, the small island of **Elafonisi** is renowned for its white beaches and visiting loggerhead turtles. Regular ferries make the 10-minute trip (up to 15 daily) from Pounda, 8km west of Neapoli.

Gythio

POP 4700

Once the port of ancient Sparta, Gythio (*yee-thih-o*) is the gateway to the Lakonian Mani. This pretty fishing town makes a pleasant but not terribly thrilling stopover if you're travelling between the Mani and Sparta or Monemvasia or if you're taking a ferry to Kythira. You can count Gythio's attractions on two fingers: the long stretch of **Mavrovouni beach**, 2km south of Gythio, and pine-shaded **Marathonisi Islet**, alleged to be ancient Cranae, where Paris of Troy and Helen consummated the affair that sparked the Trojan War.

You can bed down at **Saga Pension** (☎27330 23220; www.sagapension.gr; Kranais; s/d/tr €40/50/55; 🍷🍷), a tranquil French-run place overlooking the islet, or seek out **Camping Melfemi** (☎27330 23260; www.campingmelfemi.gr; camp sites per tent/adult €5.50/6, bungalows €30-60; ☺Apr-Oct; 🍷🍷), the pick of Mavrovouni's campgrounds, with excellent facilities.

As you can imagine, fresh fish features rather prominently on the menus of tavernas that cluster along the seafront between the pier and the causeway to Marathonisi Islet; family-run **O Potis** (☎27330 23245; mains €8-15; ☺noon-11pm) is our favourite.

i Getting There & Away

BOAT

LANE Lines (www.lane.gr; per person/car €23/70) has one weekly ferry to Crete via Kythira and Antikythira. Check the schedule with **Rozakis Travel** (☎27330 22207; rosakigy@otenet.gr; Pavlu 5), on the waterfront.

BUS

The **KTEL Lakonia bus station** (☎27330 22228; www.ktel-lakonias.gr; cnr Vasileos Georgios & Evrikleos) is northwest along the waterfront, near Jande Café. Services run north to Athens (€23.80, 4½ hours, six daily) or via Sparta (€4.30, one hour) and Tripoli (€9.70); and south to Areopoli (€2.60, 30 minutes, four daily), Gerolimenas (€6, 1¼ hours, three daily), the Diros Caves (€3.70, one hour, one daily) and Vathia (€6.80, 1½ hours, Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

To make the 6.15am Kalamata connection at Itilo, take the 5am bus (€3.80, 45 minutes, daily except Sunday) or go via Sparta. For Monemvasia, change at Sparta.

THE MANI

H MANH

Covering the central peninsula in the south of the Peloponnese, the Mani is a wild, rugged region. Greeks from elsewhere will tell you: so are its people, who regard themselves as direct descendants of the Spartans. After the decline of Sparta, citizens loyal to the principles of Lycurgus (founder of Sparta's constitution) chose to withdraw to the mountains rather than serve under foreign masters. Later, refugees from occupying powers joined these people, who became known as Maniots, from the Greek word 'mania'. For centuries the Maniots were a law unto themselves, renowned for their fierce independence, resentment of attempts to govern them and for their bitter, spectacularly murderous internal feuds.

The Ottoman Turks failed to subdue the Maniots and largely left them alone, yet Mani became the cradle of rebellion that grew into the War of Independence. Post-Greek victory, though there had been a fatal falling out with the first president of independent Greece over the spoils of victory bypassing the Maniots, they nevertheless reluctantly became part of the new kingdom in 1834.

From the steep foothills of the snow-tipped Taÿgetos Mountains to the pristine coastal coves; from the tiny villages nestling amid olive groves, connected by threads of walking trails, to the arid scenery in the south of peninsula, speckled with abandoned stone towers; the Mani has some of the most dramatic and varied scenery in the Peloponnese, much of it still wonderfully underexplored.

The Mani is generally divided into the **Messinian Mani** (or outer Mani) and the **Lakonian Mani** (or inner Mani). The Messinian Mani starts southeast of Kalamata and runs south between the coast and the Taÿgetos Mountains, while the Lakonian Mani covers the rest of the peninsula south of Itilo.

Lakonian Mani

Grey rock, mottled with defiant clumps of green scrub, characterises the steep, forbidding mountains of inner Mani. Cultivable land is at a premium here, and supports little more than a few stunted olives and figs.

i ITILO BUS INTERCHANGE

To travel between Lakonian and Messinian Mani, you must change buses at Itilo. **Itilo** (eet-ih-lo), 11km north of Areopoli, was once the medieval capital of the Mani and was traditionally regarded as the border between outer and inner Mani. There are buses to Areopoli (€1.60, 20 minutes, two daily except Sunday) and Kalamata (€4, 2¼ hours, daily). Areopoli–Itilo buses travel via Limeni.

The indented coast's sheer cliffs plunge into the sea, and rocky outcrops shelter pebbled beaches. This wild and barren landscape is broken only by imposing **stone towers**, which still stand sentinel over the region.

Long known to locals as Kakavoulia, or 'Land of evil counsel', this tough, mesmerising land makes for a fantastic road trip if you have your own wheels. You can follow the loop that runs south along the west coast from the main town, Areopoli, detouring along narrow lanes into semi-deserted villages. Stop to peek into family chapels (there are almost as many churches and chapels as there are towers, as you wouldn't worship with the enemy), and walk to Mani's southernmost tip before returning via the east coast (or vice versa). For detailed exploration, arm yourself with a copy of the Anavasi Topo 25 map, *Mani 8.4*; 1:30,000.

Areopoli

POP 800

Areopoli (ah-reh-o-po-lih), capital of the Mani, is aptly named after Ares, the god of war. Dominating the main square, Plateia Athanaton, is a statue of Petrobey Mavromihalis, who proclaimed the Maniot insurrection against the Ottoman Empire in 1821. His brother and son, Konstantinos and Georgios Mavromichalis, were responsible for the assassination of Ioannis Kapodistrias (p139), the first president of independent Greece, in 1831. The town retains many other reminders of its rumbustious past.

👁 Sights

There are some fine examples of Maniot architecture in the narrow, cobbled alleyways surrounding Plateia 17 Martiou, with most of the fortified towers built by the Mavromichalis clan.

Church of Taxiarhes

CHURCH

(Plateia 17 Martiou) On the southern side of Plateia 17 Martiou is this 18th-century church. Its four-storey bell tower marks it as the most important of Areopoli's many churches. The extremely well-preserved relief carvings above the main door look as if they belong to a much earlier era than the 18th century.

Church of Agios Ioannis

CHURCH

Built by the Mavromichalis family on a tiny square west of the main square, this church contains a series of well-preserved frescoes relating the life of Jesus.

Pikoulakis Tower House Museum

MUSEUM

(admission €2; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) Housed in a restored tower, this museum displays exquisite Byzantine pieces from Mani churches. These include a 12th-century marble templon from the Church of Agios Ioannis in Mina, near Pyrgos Dirou. Upstairs is a clutch of well-preserved icons spanning five centuries. Take the westbound road from the southwest corner of the main square.

Mavromichalis Tower

RUIN

(Tzani Tzanaki) The Mavromichalis Tower, in a little square southwest of Plateia 17 Martiou, was once the mightiest tower in town, but now it stands sadly derelict.

🚶 Activities

There is some rewarding walking in the area, though the trails are not as straightforward to follow as their colour-coded counterparts in Kardamyli. A number of local guesthouse owners, including that of Antares (p159), are involved in trail maintenance and are happy to give walking tips.

🏠 Sleeping

Hotel Kouris

HOTEL €

(☎ 27330 51340; www.hotelkouris.gr; Plateia Athanaton; s/d/tr €30/50/60; 📞) Right on the main square, this concrete cheapie may lack ambience, but it's clean, central and has reliable wi-fi.

★ Londas Guesthouse

B&B €€

(☎ 27330 51360; www.londas.com; near Church of Taxiarhes; s/d/tr incl breakfast €70/80/110, s/d incl breakfast & without bathroom €60/70; 📞) This 200-year-old tower is the undisputed king of the castle: stylish whitewashed rooms tastefully decorated in an antique and modern fusion; a gorgeous rooftop terrace; a bright, vaulted guest lounge; and extensive break-

fasts that use fresh local produce. It's just north of the Church of Taxiarches and has a minimum two-night stay. The owners can help organise walks in the mountains.

Hotel Trapela

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎ 27330 52690; www.trapela.gr; s/d/tr €60/80/90; ♿) The rough-hewn stone and lack of balconies at this 12-room boutique hotel are a nod to traditional Maniot architecture. The rooms, each named after a Maniot settlement, sport exposed stone, muted colours and wooden beams, coupled with supremely comfortable furnishings.

Eating & Drinking

Areopoli has half a dozen tavernas and several cafes and bars clustered along its main street. For self-caterers, there's a small Koilakos supermarket near Plateia Athanaton.

Barba Petros

TAVERNA €

(☎ 27330 51205; mains €6.50-14; ☺ noon-11pm) This long-standing taverna has been in the family since 1917. The current grandchild/owner and his daughter run the show. This is the place to pig out in every sense – the owner breeds his own pigs, and other meats are sourced locally. Local specialities include

TOWER HOUSES

Dotted around the Mani, particularly around Kakavoulia (or inner Mani), scores of stone towers rise eerily from the landscape. Some are solitary; some stand in clusters. Some are intact and fortress-like; others are crumbling. From the 17th century until well into the 19th century, the Mani was ruled by clans with chieftains, with bloody feuds constantly fought over what little fertile land there was. These towers were family fortresses. Feuds between warring clans were fought according to strict rules of engagement, the objective being the destruction of the rival's tower and the deaths of the male members of the rival's family. Male children were known as 'guns' (what else would they be useful for?) and women were exempt from the feuds; after all, someone had to till the fields and bury the dead.

Today, a growing number of towers are being restored beyond their former glory and turned into unique places to stay. Here are our favourite retreats:

Antares (☎ 27330 51700; www.antareshotel.gr; Omale; d/ste incl breakfast €90/170; ♿) (P) (☺)

Run by the knowledgeable Mina, this beautiful tower house, 1.5km south of Areopoli, seamlessly blends the historic (centuries-old vaulted ceilings, exposed stone walls) with the contemporary (superb beds, powerful showers). Rooms look out over the lovingly tended herb garden and breakfast ingredients are hand-picked from local suppliers. The tranquillity and care that guests experience here inspire many to linger or return.

Citta dei Nicliani (www.cittadeinicliani.com; d/ste incl breakfast from €100/140; ♿) (P) (☺) The former stronghold of the namesake Mani clan is split between this luxurious hotel and the tower house in nearby Stavri. Expect individual engravings on stone walls, exquisite beds and heavy wooden beams (the split-level Timeless room is our favourite). The extensive breakfast makes great use of fresh local produce, and guests can engage in hiking and wine tasting.

Sventoura Hotel (☎ 6975798180, 27330 53006; www.sventourahotel.com; r incl breakfast €60-120; ♿) (P) (☺) Tucked away en route from Pyrgos Dirou to the Diros Caves, this handsome tower, run by a wonderfully welcoming family, has just five unique, characterful rooms. Vaulted ceilings, an antler chandelier, antique chests, wrought-iron bedsteads and bathroom sinks, hewn artfully out of stone, all conspire to give the lodgings that potent Maniot vibe.

Tainaron Blue (☎ 27333 00461; www.tainatonblue.com; d/ste incl breakfast €150/200; ♿) (☺) (☺) This lonely stone tower en route from Gerolimenas to Porto Kagio is truly a retreat: there's nothing for miles around, except for breathtaking coastline views...which you can enjoy from the clifftop infinity pool. The three luxurious rooms are all unadorned stone and vaulted ceilings, combined with sumptuous beds. The Maniot cuisine is top-notch.

Pirgos Mavromichali Hotel (☎ 27330 51042; www.pirgosmavromichali.gr; d incl breakfast €130, ste €300; ☺ closed Jan & Feb; ♿) (☺) The owner has beautifully converted his family's 300-year-old tower house in Limeni into 13 chic rooms with rain showers and Cocomat beds. Delightful touches abound, from the vaulted lounge and little private beach to the luxurious split-level suite.

DON'T MISS

LIMENI

AIMENI

The tiny village of Limeni, 3km north of Areopoli on the southern flank of aquamarine Limeni Bay, is well worth a stop for two culinary heavyweights.

Teloneio (☎ 27330 52702; www.teloneio-limeni.gr; mains €9-18; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺☺) This colourful seafront restaurant and bar serves imaginative fare, such as roasted *kriitharaki* (rice-shaped pasta) with crayfish, stuffed zucchini flowers, and grilled *talagani* cheese with prickly-pea marmalade. The presentation is on par with the flavours.

Takis (☎ 27330 51327; fish per kg €50-65; ☺ lunch & dinner Apr-Oct) In a beautiful seafront location, Takis lures in diners with simply yet beautifully prepared fresh fish. The results are consistently good, according to modest Takis, 'because I love what I do.'

vegetable stew, piglet with plum sauce and aubergines baked with potatoes.

Bukka Home Bar

COCKTAIL BAR

A creeper-clad cafe by day, come evening this joint morphs into a sultry cocktail bar. Slip into the vaulted cavern and sip on a smoky margarita or a pornstar martini.

**Shopping****Invincible Mani**

BOOKS

(☎ 27330 53670; Plateia Athanaton) Has an excellent selection of hiking maps and books on the region.

**Information**

The town is split into two parts: the new upper town, around Plateia Athanaton, and the old lower town, around Plateia 17 Martiou. The two are linked by a 'main' lane.

National Bank of Greece (Petrobey Mavromihali) The only bank in town; has an ATM. In the upper town.

Post office (Petrobey Mavromihali; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) At the northern edge of the upper town.

**Getting There & Away**

The **bus station** (☎ 27330 51229; Plateia Athanaton) is situated in the middle of a vast car park at the town's northern end.

Buses to Gythio (€2.60, 30 minutes, four daily) proceed to Athens (€27).

Buses to Itilo (€1.60, 20 minutes, two daily except Sunday) run via Limeni. Other destinations include Gerolimenas (€3.40, 45 minutes, three daily), the Diros Caves (€1.60, 15 minutes, departs 10.15am and returns 12.45pm), Lagia (€3.70, 40 minutes, one daily) and Vathia (€4.20, one hour, daily in summer).

Diros Caves**Σπήλαιο Διρού**

The extraordinary **Diros caves** (☎ 27330 52222; www.diros-cave.gr; adult/concession €12/7; ☺ 8.30am-5.30pm), inhabited for thousands of years from Neolithic times and systematically explored from 1949, lie 11km south of Areopoli, and are signposted near the village of Pyrgos Dirou.

The entrance to the caves is on the beach. Guides speak Greek, so if you're with non-Greeks you'll be treated to a half-hour's silent, eerie glide by boat through the cave's many passages, giving you time to admire the beautiful stalagmites and stalactites, many of the latter as fine as gossamer threads. You then walk the remaining 300m on foot.

Abandoned as human habitation in 4 BC after an earthquake, the caves weren't rediscovered until around 1895. Then in 1949 the local husband and wife speleology team of Yiannis and Anna Petrocheilou began to systematically explore the caves, now estimated to be around 14km long. Underwater exploration continues to this day.

Pyrgos Dirou to Gerolimenas**Πύργος Διρού προς Γερολιμένας**

Journeying south down Mani's west coast from Pyrgos Dirou to Gerolimenas, the barren mountain landscape is broken only by semi-deserted settlements with mighty towers. A left turn-off 3km south of Pyrgos Dirou heads up through the picturesque villages of **Drialos**, **Vamvaka**, **Briki** and **Mina**, which have fine examples of Maniot stonework, before depositing you back on the main road, 3km north of Kita. A right turn 9km south of Pyrgos Dirou leads down to the **Bay of Mezapos**, sheltered to the east by the frying-pan-shaped Tigani peninsula. The ruins on the peninsula are those of the **Castle of Maina**, built by the Frankish leader Guillaume de Villehardouin in 1248 and subsequently adapted by the Byzantines.

Kita, 13km south of Pyrgos Dirou, has the lion's share of the west coast's war towers and fortified houses. It was the setting

for the last great interfamily feud recorded in the Mani, which erupted in 1870 and required the intervention of the army, complete with artillery, to force a truce. Just west of Kita, **Nomia** also bristles with some superb tower remains.

Gerolimenas

Γερολιμένας

POP 60

Gerolimenas (yeh-ro-lih-meh-nahss) is a tranquil fishing village built around a small, sheltered bay at the southwestern tip of the Mani peninsula. Its pebble beach overlooks teal waters and it's a popular weekend get-away for well-heeled Athenians.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a small supermarket on the promenade, and several cafes and tavernas.





Kyrimi B&B

B&B €€

(☎ 27330 53078; www.kyrimi.com; r incl breakfast €90-120;     ) Consisting of just four luxurious rooms, this intimate B&B inside a traditional stone house is run by a friendly family. Your hosts are happy to explain the history of the area and will feed you an ample breakfast that includes delicious homemade pies. Each room has a patio overlooking the sea – perfect for sunbathing.

Hotel Kirimai

LUXURY HOTEL €€€

(☎ 27330 54288; www.kyrimai.gr; d incl breakfast €110-200, ste incl breakfast €260-300;     ) Kirimai is a luxurious converted historic building in an idyllic setting at the far southern end of the harbour. Opt for the stone-floored, timber-beamed suites if you can, as the cheaper doubles are cramped and dark in typical Maniot style. The breakfast is substantial; the international restaurant is open to nonguests, but staff could use some training in professionalism.

Getting There & Away

There are three buses daily from Gerolimenas to Areopoli (€5, 45 minutes), which head on to Athens (€30, five hours), Gythio (€10, 1¼ hours) and Sparta (€17, 2¼ hours). The bus stop is outside Hotel Akrotenaritis.

Gerolimenas to Porto Kagio

Γερολιμένας προς Πόρτο Καγιο

South of Gerolimenas, the road continues 4km to the small village of **Alika**, where it divides. One road leads across the moun-

tains to the east coast, and the other goes south to Vathia and Porto Kagio. The southern road follows the coast, passing pebbly beaches. It then climbs steeply inland to **Vathia**, the most photographed of the traditional Mani villages, comprising a cluster of closely packed tower houses perched on a rocky spur.

If you have nerves of steel and wish to see an equally impressive traditional village with practically no visitors, take the road into the mountains from Alika and then the turn-off to **Mountanistika**. The road is very narrow, with a drop to one side and few places for passing, so pray for a lack of oncoming vehicles.

A turn-off to the right 3km south of Vathia splits in two. The right-hand road also splits in two: the right branch leads to **Marmari**, with its two sandy beaches, while the main road heads as far south as you can go for 3km, to Kokinogia, where there's a taverna and little else.

The left-hand road from the turn-off south of Vathia cuts across the peninsula to the tiny east-coast fishing village of **Porto Kagio**, set on a perfect horseshoe bay popular with the international yachting set. It's a tranquil place to spend the night. The waterfront tavernas there have similar menus (mains €7 to €17, fish per kilogram €40 to €70) featuring seafood and local specialities, such as wild greens pie.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

CAPE TENARO

From the car park below the taverna at Kokinogia, at the south of the Mani peninsula, it's a beautiful 30-minute walk along an uneven rocky path to one of Europe's southernmost points, **Cape Tenaro** (or Cape Matapan), where a restored lighthouse stands. The cape has been an important location for millennia and was first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*.

At the beginning of the path are the ruins of ancient **Tainaron**, once a thriving Roman city (look out for the stunning wave-patterned, circular mosaic), while another short path leads to the ruined church built on the foundations of **Poseidon's Temple**. Nearby is a cave rumoured to be the entrance to **Hades**.

Sleeping

Hotel Psamatous

HOTEL €

(☎ 27330 55221; www.portokayio.com; ☎ Porto Kagio; d/tr incl breakfast €55/80; 📞 📺 📶) This Flintstones-style modern Maniot place is set back from the waterfront and has stone-platform beds, mezzanines, heavy wooden beam ceilings and iron bedsteads.

Porto Kala

GUESTHOUSE €

(☎ 6980755528, 27330 54202; Porto Kagio; d/q €55/80; 📞 📺 📶) A good option in Porto Kagio – simple, snug rooms with stone walls and sun terraces.

East Coast

The east coast of the Mani peninsula is even more rugged and barren than the west. The main town is the formidable-looking **Lagia**, 12km northeast of the Alikia turn-off. Perched some 400m above sea level, it was once the chief town of the southeastern Mani, and some of its towers stand derelict.

From Lagia, the road winds down with spectacular views of the little fishing harbour of **Agios Kyprianos** – a short diversion from the main road. The next village is **Kokala**, a busy place with two pebbled beaches. The best beach is further north at **Nyfi**, where a turn-off to the right leads to sheltered **Alipa Beach**. Continuing north, a turn-off beyond tower-studded **Flomochori** descends east to **Kotronas**, while the main road cuts west across the peninsula to Areopoli.

Messinian Mani

The Messinian Mani, or outer Mani, lies to the north of its Lakonian counterpart, sandwiched between the Taygetos Mountains and the west coast of the Mani peninsula. The rugged coast is scattered with small coves and beaches, and backed by mountains that remain snowcapped until late May. Kardamyli features the region's best-organised hiking opportunities, and there are some good options around Stoupa, too.

Stoupa

Στούπα

POP 630

The former fishing village of Stoupa, 10km south of Kardamyli, is a resort village popular with British and German package tourists, and is at its most pleasant during the shoulder seasons. It has excellent beaches with wonderfully clean, cold water, courte-

sy of underground springs, and there's good hiking in the hills above the village.

Celebrated author Nikos Kazantzakis lived here for a while and based the protagonist of *Zorba the Greek* on Alexis Zorbas, a coal-mine supervisor in Pastrova, near Stoupa.

Beaches

Stoupa has two main beaches: the large, main crescent of golden sand, sheltered from waves and popular with families, and the smaller **Kalogria**, with deeper waters, just beyond the headland to the north of the main beach. From Kalogria it's a 10-minute walk to the peaceful **Delfini Cove**.

Sleeping & Eating

Stoupa's many pensions and custom-built domatia are often block-booked by package-tour operators in summer; book ahead.

With one notable exception, Stoupa's underwhelming restaurants all cater to the package-holiday crowd; you're better off with the taverns in Kardamyli or Exochori.

Hotel Lefktron

HOTEL €€

(☎ 27210 77322; www.lefktron-hotel.gr; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €72/82/113; ☺ Apr-Oct; 📞 📺 📶) A five-minute walk from the main beach, family-run Lefktron is well appointed and has rooms overlooking the pool. A good Greek breakfast is included and the staff is happy to give tips on local walks.

Hotel Stoupa

HOTEL €€

(☎ 27210 77308; www.hotel-stoupa.gr; s/d incl breakfast €75/85; 📞 📺 📶) This 20-room hotel is simple but clean and comfortable, and it's Stoupa's only hotel open in winter. It's a couple of blocks behind the beach.

★ Voula's Yesterday & Today

MEDITERRANEAN €€

(☎ 27210 77535; www.voula-yesterdayandtoday.gr; mains €7-12.50; ☺ 6.30pm-late May-Oct; 📞) Indomitable Voula, in her words, 'cooks from her heart'. She serves up traditional foods from a bygone era with a personal, contemporary take. Treats include smoked pork dishes (€12.50), superb homemade pies and *trachana* (homemade pasta). She hosts exhibits on the Mani and has a recipe book – the culmination of clients asking for her secrets.

Information

Stoupa is 1km west of the main Areopoli-Kalamata road, connected by roads both north and south of town. Both roads lead to the larger of Stoupa's main beaches.

Katerina's Supermarket (☎ 27210 77777)

Well-stocked supermarket that doubles as the post office.

Thomeas Travel (☎ 27210 77689; www.thomeastravel.gr; ☀ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat)

Changes money and organises car hire, excursions to sites, and ferry and air tickets. Also has a good book exchange and up-to-date bus timetables.

i Getting There & Away

Buses stop at the junctions of the northern and southern approach roads but don't enter the town. One bus (two in summer) heads daily to Itilo (50 minutes) at 2.10pm, and four head to Kalamata (€4.40, 1½ hours) at 7.30am, 10.55am, 3.50pm and 8.40pm, via Kardamyli. Get to the bus stop early, as buses sometimes pass ahead of schedule.

Kardamyli**Καρδαμύλη**

POP 300

It's easy to see why Kardamyli (kahr-dah-mee-lih) was one of the seven cities offered to Achilles by Agamemnon. This tiny village has one of the prettiest settings in the Peloponnese, nestled between the blue waters of the Messinian Gulf and the Taygetos Mountains. The **Vyros Gorge**, which emerges just north of town, runs to the foot of **Mt Profitis Ilias** (2407m), the highest peak of the Taygetos. Today the gorge and surrounding areas are very popular with hikers, with numerous trails passing through tiny, timeless villages.

Several scenes from the movie *Before Midnight*, featuring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy (released in 2013), were shot around Kardamyli. The area has also long been a place of pilgrimage for devotees of the legendary writer Patrick Leigh Fermor, who lived in nearby Kalamitsi Bay for several decades until his death in 2011. Fermor fought in the Greek Resistance in WWII and wrote *Mani*, which is considered by many to be the definitive book on the region.

i Activities

Hiking is easily Kardamyli's biggest drawcard. The hills behind the village are criss-crossed by an extensive network of well-marked hiking trails that consist of old stone paths, minor roads, dirt footpaths and a dry riverbed. A number of villages above Kardamyli and Stoupa are connected by winding, narrow paved roads, which make for fairly strenuous, scenic cycling.

Several walking trails pass through the mountain village of **Exohorio**, perched on the edge of the Vyros Gorge at an altitude of 450m, where author Patrick Leigh Fermor scattered fellow travel writer Bruce Chatwin's ashes. The turn-off to Exohorio is 3km south of Kardamyli.

Our favourite hiking route around Kardamyli include **Kardamyli–Aghia Sofia–Petrovouni–Kardamyli**, a gorgeous two-hour loop from Kardamyli's old town up to the Aghia Sofia Church, then a descent through an enchanted forest to Petrovouni and back to Kardamyli.

Chora–Likaki Monastery–Kardamyli is a four-hour descent through the picturesque ramshackle Chora village, a downhill ramble through olive groves and a tramp through the striking canyon along a rock-strewn riverbed with a detour to see the Likaki Monastery frescoes.

Chora–Saidona–Prastio is a 2¼-hour downhill walk from Chora through the village of Nikovo, passing through olive groves and lush greenery en route to Saidona. There are fantastic coastal views along the Saidona–Prastio descent.

2407 Mountain Activities

OUTDOORS

(☎ 27210 73752; www.2407m.com) This professional outfit offers a range of outdoor adventures, from half-day hikes (from €50 per person; minimum four people) to full-day assaults on Taygetos peak (€200), rock climbing (on an 80m-high rock; €40), occasional mountain-bike trips (and advice

i HIKING AROUND KARDAMYLI & STOUPA

To make sense of Kardamyli's colour-coded trails and to navigate your hike above Stoupa, invest in the excellent Anavasi Topo25 map: *Mani: Kardamyli–Stoupa–Aghios Nikolaos 8.12/13; 1:25,000*, available from village supermarkets. To avoid retracing your steps, you can get a taxi to drop you off in the village of your choice (book in advance via your lodgings) and walk back to Kardamyli or Stoupa.

Carry more drinking water than you think you'll need, a sun hat, a torch (flashlight) and strong footwear to support your ankles on the uneven ground. Watch out for the odd scorpion and snake (most snakes are harmless).

for independent mountain bikers) and even cooking courses. They don't enter villages en masse, and prefer to stick to secret locations. The office is halfway along the main street.

Sleeping

There are plenty of domatia signs along the main road. Prices are considerably lower outside high season.

Olympia Koumounakou Rooms PENSION € (☎ 27210 73623; s/d €35/40; 🏠🏠) Olympia loves her budget travellers (as they do her) and offers five clean rooms with bathrooms in the centre of the village. It's a stone's throw from the water, and has an appealing garden to boot.

Y Volvere Studios (Stratis Bravakos Rooms) APARTMENT € (☎ 27210 73326; www.yvolvere.gr; d/tr €40/55) Y Volvere is great value for compact, spotless studio apartments with kitchenettes. It's at the south end of the village, along a street leading towards the water.

★ **Hotel Vardia** HOTEL €€ (☎ 27210 73777; www.vardia-hotel.gr; studio €80, apt €115-165; ☺ Mar-Nov; 📺📺📺) This relaxing and stylish stone hotel (near a former sentry tower and situated high behind the village beyond Old Kardamyli) sits amid lush grounds, and has very helpful owners. The 18 spacious studio-style rooms have exceptional views of the Messinian Gulf and there are lounge chairs overlooking the gorge for sunset-watching. Vardia is signposted from the southern end of town.

Maison Viros APARTMENT €€ (☎ 6972098289; www.maison-viros.com; studio/ apt €140/180; 📺📺📺) Just across the bridge from central Kardamyli, these spacious split-level apartments and studios are found inside delightful stone houses arranged around a pool, surrounded by attractively landscaped grounds. The apartments sleep up to six people, the studios four, and owner Nikos goes out of his way to be helpful.

Kalamitsi Hotel HOTEL €€ (☎ 27210 73131; www.kalamitsi-hotel.gr; d/ste incl breakfast €110/160; 📺📺) Situated 1km south of town, the Kalamitsi is a lovely, modern stone-built hotel with serene, well-appointed rooms. Family bungalows are also available for €220. Within its shady grounds are paths leading to a secluded pebbly beach. Home-

cooked dinners and fresh buffet breakfasts are available to guests.

Eating

The inland villages of Saidona, Mileu and Exochori also have some excellent tavernas.

There are two well-stocked supermarkets at the northern edge of the village.

O Perivolis TAVERNA € (☎ 27210 73713; mains €8-12; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun, closed Dec; 📺) In the heart of the village, this excellent taverna with a large garden usually has a selection of vegetarian dishes of the day (spinach and ricotta cannelloni, baked aubergine) alongside Greek classics such as lamb *kleftiko*, all of which incorporate local ingredients where possible.

Taverna Kiki TAVERNA € (☎ 27210 73148; mains €6.50-9; ☺ lunch & dinner) The kindly owners at this appealing taverna, tucked away off the main street, tell you the day's dishes on arrival. These tend to be more imaginative than usual; expect the likes of veal stew with shallots and cloves, and cauliflower baked with tomatoes.

Lola Frozen Yogurt ICE CREAM € (medium yoghurt €2.50; ☺ 9.30am-late; 📺📺) A cool, sweet balm for sweaty hikers on hot days, right on the main street. Go for regular or guest flavours, such as cherry or mango.

★ **Elies** TAVERNA €€ (☎ 27210 73140; mains €8-14; ☺ lunch Apr-Oct, dinner mid-Jun-mid-Sep; 📺📺) Right by Ritsa beach, 1km north of town, and nestled in olive groves, Kardamyli's most popular lunch venue has the atmosphere of a provincial Mediterranean private garden. It presents the best selection of top-notch Greek and Mani fare to boot, including numerous veggie dishes.

Information

Kardamyli is on the main Areopoli-Kalamata road. The central square, Plateia 25 Martiou 1821, lies at the northern end of the main thoroughfare.

Kardamyli's main pebble-and-stone beach is off the road to Kalamata; turn left beyond the bridge on the northern edge of town. The road up to Old (or Upper) Kardamyli is on the right before the bridge.

The **post office** (☺ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) is on the main strip.

A useful website is www.kardamili-greece.com.

i Getting There & Around

Kardamyli is on the bus route between Kalamata (around €4, one hour, four daily) and Stoupa (€1.50, 15 minutes); one bus daily continues south to Itilo. The bus stops at the central square at the northern end of the main thoroughfare, and at the bookshop at the southern end.

Buses to the villages in the hills above Kardamyli are too infrequent and sporadic to be useful. A taxi to Exochorio costs around €20.

MESSINIA ΜΕΣΣΗΝΙΑ

The southwestern corner of the Peloponnese has many boons, from the peninsula's loveliest beaches to old Venetian towns, impressive castles and even an underwater park in the making.

Messinia's boundaries were established in 371 BC following the defeat of Sparta by the Thebans at the Battle of Leuctra. The defeat ended almost 350 years of Spartan domination of the Peloponnese – during which time Messinian exiles founded the city of Messinia in Sicily – and meant the Messinians were left free to develop their kingdom in the region stretching west from the Taygetos Mountains. Their capital was Ancient Messini, about 25km northwest of Kalamata on the slopes of Mt Ithomi.

Kalamata Καλαμάτα

Kalamata is the capital of Messinia and the second-largest city in the Peloponnese. Most travellers just pass through it, only pausing to partake of its facilities and its decent restaurants.

Built on the site of ancient Pharai, the city takes its modern name from a miracle-working icon of the Virgin Mary known as *kalo mata* (good eye). It was discovered in the stables of the Ottoman *aga* (governor), who converted to Christianity as a result of the

miracles it was believed to have performed. The icon now resides inside the city's oversized cathedral, the Church of Ypapantis.

Below the *kastro* is the small but attractive old town, which was almost totally destroyed by the Turks during the War of Independence, rebuilt by French engineers in the 1830s, then levelled again by an earthquake in 1986. A lively Saturday food market just to the west of the old town sells Kalamata olives and other local produce.

Sights

Archaeological Museum of Messenia

MUSEUM

(☎ 27210 83485; www.archmusmes.gr; Benaki & Agiou Ioannou; admission €3; ☀ 1.30-8pm Mon & 8am-8pm Tue-Sun) This partially interactive, child-friendly museum focuses on treasures found in four regions – Kalamata, Pylia, Messini and Trifylia. A trail snakes through the maze of exhibits, revealing everything from sculpture, pottery and funereal objects found in Mycenaean *tholos* tombs, to Roman mosaics, gold jewellery and votive offerings.

Kastro

FORT

(Vilardouinou; €2; ☀ 8am-5pm Tue-Sun) Looming over the town is the 13th-century *kastro*. Remarkably, it survived the powerful 1986 earthquake that levelled the city. The entry gate is its most impressive feature. Inside, the *kastro* is a hush haven of tranquillity and there are good views from the battlements.

Festivals & Events

Kalamata International Dance Festival

MUSIC, DANCE

(www.kalamatadancefestival.gr; ☀ Jul) This annual festival draws crowds to its quality performances of traditional music and dance. Venues include the amphitheatre of the *kastro*. See the website for dates and prices.

KALAMATA OLIVES

Kalamata gives its name to the prized Kalamata olive, a plump, purple-black variety found in delicatessens around the world. The region's reliable winter rains and hot summers make for perfect olive-growing conditions.

The Kalamata tree is distinguished from the common olive (grown for oil) by the size of its leaves. Like its fruit, the leaves of the Kalamata are twice the size of other varieties and a darker shade of green.

Unlike other varieties, Kalamata olives can't be picked green. They ripen in late November and must be hand-picked to avoid bruising. You can buy and sample these famous olives at the markets in Kalamata.

Kalamata


Sleeping & Eating

The majority of lodgings are located along the waterfront. The marina is lined with restaurants and tavernas; good options are also found in the old town.

Hotel Rex

HOTEL €€

(☎ 27210 22334; www.rexhotel.gr; Aristomenous 26; d/stc incl breakfast from €99/199; ♿) The Rex has a superb central location and will appeal if you like unapologetically retro decor, a Fawlty Towers-esque attitude from some staff and a touch of faded grandeur. The rooms are reasonably modern but the air-con struggles in the summer heat. The corner room 403 has good rooftop views.

Hotel Haikos

HOTEL €€

(☎ 27210 88902; www.haikos.gr; Navarino 115; s/d €57/75; ♿) One of the best choices along the beachfront is this business-like, modern hotel, with funky wallpaper, balconies and beachfront parking. Rooms at the front catch the sea breeze (and street noise). Breakfast €5.

Street Pasta

ITALIAN €

(☎ 27214 01328; Amfias 20; mains €6-11; ☺ 2-11pm Tue-Sun; ♿) Hip, tiny eatery specialising in oodles of pasta, with imaginative sauces alongside good ol' bolognese and pesto. Elbow your way in and be prepared for leisurely service if the place is full.

Burgery

BURGERS €

(www.theburgery.gr; Navarinou 93; mains €5-8; ☺ 1pm-midnight; ♿) One of the very few places along the marina that doesn't do seafood, the Burgery grills up huge, freshly made burgers, generously stacked with toppings that slither out the sides and ooze all over your fingers as you try to take a bite.

Kalamata

Sights

- 1 Archaeological Museum of Messenia.....A2
- 2 Kastro.....B1

Sleeping

- 3 Hotel Haikos.....B7
- 4 Hotel Rex.....A2

Eating

- 5 Street Pasta.....A2

Information

- Tourist Support Office.....(see 1)

i Information

National Bank of Greece (Aristomenous, Central Sq, cnr Akrita & Navarinou)

Post office (cnr Olgas & Navarinou; ☎7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist police (☎27210 24680; Iroon Polytechniou; ☎8am-9pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist support office (☎27210 90413; Benaki; ☎9am-2pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) This helpful tourist office, in the same building as the Archaeological Museum, has a plethora of brochures on Messinia's attractions.

i Getting There & Away

AIR

Kalamata International Airport is served by various airlines from Nuremburg, Amsterdam and London Gatwick in summer. **Aegean Airlines** (www.aegeanair.com) operates daily flights between Kalamata and Athens and Thessaloniki from June through September.

BOAT

Between mid-June and September, a weekly ferry service operated by **LANE Ferries** (www.lane.gr) runs on Sundays from Kalamata to Kissamos, Crete (€32/84 per person/car, 9½ hours) via Kythira (€21.50/56 per person/car, 5½ hours). Contact **SMAN Travel/Maniatis** (☎27210 20704; cnr Likourgou & Psaron 148), by the port, for the schedule.

BUS

KTEL Messinia bus station (☎27210 28581; www.ktelmessinias.gr; Artemidos) has buses to Athens (€22.20, 4½ hours, 12 daily) via Corinth Isthmus (€15.80, 2½ hours). It also has buses to Tripoli (€8.10, 1¼ hours, five daily), Kyprisia (€7, 1¼ hours, four weekdays) and Patra (€22.80, four hours, two daily) via Pyrgos (€14, two hours).

Heading west, buses go to Koroni (€5, 1½ hours, three to six daily), Methoni (€6.10, 1½ hours, five daily) and Pylos (€5, 1¼ hours, five daily).

Heading east across the Langada Pass, buses run to Sparta (€5, 1¾ hours, daily at 9.15am) with a change at Artemisia. Four daily buses head to Kardamyli (€4, one hour) and Stoupa (€4.40, 1¼ hours), with one continuing to Itilo (€7.40, 2¼ hours). There are also direct buses to Thessaloniki (€65, three weekly, 11 hours).

i Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Kalamata's airport is 10.5km west of the city, near Messini. A taxi costs around €20.

BUS

Local buses leave from the KTEL Messinia bus station. The most useful service is bus 1, which

goes south to the seafront and then east along Navarinou as far as the Floxenia Hotel. Buy tickets (€1.20) from kiosks or the driver.

CAR

Recommended car rental options:

Avis (☎27210 20352; www.avis.gr; Kesari 2)

Verga Rent a Car (☎27210 95190; www.car-rental-kalamata.gr; Faron 202)

Ancient Messini

Αρχαία Μεσσήνη

POP 350

The extensive ruins of Ancient Messini lie scattered across a small valley below the pretty village of Mavromati, 25km northwest of Kalamata, signposted from the modern town of Messini. The village takes its name from the fountain in the central square; the water gushes from a hole in the rock that looks like a black eye (*mavro mati*, in Greek). The name Ancient Messini is used to refer to both the historic site and the village itself.

History

Ancient Messini was founded in 371 BC after the Theban general Epaminondas defeated Sparta at the Battle of Leuctra, freeing the Messinians from almost 350 years of Spartan rule. Built on the site of an earlier stronghold, the new Messinian capital was one of a string of defensive positions designed to keep watch over Sparta. Epaminondas himself helped to plan the fortifications, which were based on a massive wall that stretched 9km around the surrounding ridges and completely enclosed the town.

Apart from its defensive potential, Ancient Messini was also favoured by the gods. According to local myth, Zeus was born here – not Crete – and raised by the nymphs Neda and Ithomi, who bathed him in the same spring that gives the modern village its name.

Sights

★ Ancient Messini

HISTORIC SITE

(☎27240 51201; www.ancientmessene.gr; adult/concession €4/2, museum & site €5/3; ☎8am-8pm) The remains of this vast ancient city are at least as extensive as those of Olympia and Epidavros, yet Ancient Messini receives only a fraction of their visitors. Picturesquely situated on a hillside below the village of Mavromati and still undergoing excavation, the site comprises a large theatre, an *agora*, a vast Sanctuary of Asclepius and the most

UNDERWATER WORLDS

Messinia's rich historical heritage also lies underwater. The latest ambitious government project is to create an underwater park in two locations, one near Pylos and the other around Sapienza Islet, just south of Methoni, to allow divers to explore a wealth of shipwrecks from through the ages.

Sapienza once lay on an important maritime route between Italy and the Middle East, and the wrecks around the islet yield treasures such as granite columns from King Herod of Palestine, Roman stone sarcophagi and amphorae.

The Bay of Navarino near Pylos hosted the immense naval Battle of Navarino in 1827 and the sea floor is littered with ship remains, the most impressive being the three Ottoman warships. There's also an immense recent shipwreck of the *Irene Serenade* tanker.

The project is still in the making; for updates, contact **Ionian Divers** (☎27630 61551; www.ioniandivercenter.gr).

intact and impressive of all ancient Greek stadiums.

Take the downhill turn-off near the museum, about 300m northwest of the square.

The first construction you come across is the large **amphitheatre**, reconstructed for contemporary use. The path leads past the **Fountain of Arsinoe** building, which supplied the ancient city with water. The extensive columned remains next to it are the **agora** (marketplace) with the **treasury** in its southwest corner. The Greek general Philopoemen was held prisoner by the Messinians here in 183 BC and dispatched to the other world with poison.

Beyond is the **Sanctuary of Asclepius**, the spiritual centre that lay at the heart of the ancient city, consisting of a rectangular courtyard fringed with Corinthian columns. This extensive complex was centred on a Doric temple that once housed a golden statue of Ithomi. The modern awning west of the temple protects the **artemision**, where fragments of an enormous statue of Artemis Orthia were found. The structures to the east of the asclepion include the **ekklesiasterion**, which looks like a small amphitheatre but once acted as an assembly hall. Nearby are the remains of a **Roman villa**, the steel roof protecting the mosaic remains.

Head downhill to the large **stadium**, which is surrounded by a forest of columns. You can see where the Romans closed off part of the athletics track, turning it into a gladiator arena. On the left-hand side, near the arena, are the **VIP seats** – the ones with backs and with lion paws for legs. On the right-hand side, near the intact gate of the enormous gymnasium, are round holes in stone slabs – ingenious **Roman public toilets** positioned over a now dry stream.

The cube-like building near the toilets is a **grave memorial** to an important Messinian family, and the Doric temple at the far end of the stadium is a **mausoleum** of the Saithidae, a prominent Roman family.

Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/concession €2/1, museum & site €5/3; ☀8.30am-8pm) The compact museum, by the turn-off for the site, houses some wonderful statuary from Ancient Messini. They include the fine specimen of manhood that is Hermes, fierce Artemis, an ugly Roman emperor statue carved from a female Greek statue, and also Machaon and Podaleiros, the sons of Asclepius. The latter are thought to be the work of Damophon, who specialised in oversized statues of gods and heroes and who was responsible for many of the statues that once adorned Ancient Messini.

Arcadian Gate

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

It's worth heading 800m along the road from Mavromati village, past the museum at the turn-off to the site, to the celebrated Arcadian Gate. This unusual stone portal with a circular courtyard between the double gates and an immense, half-collapsed gate post guarded the ancient route to Megalopoli – now the road north to Meligalas and Zerbisia – which runs through the gate. Running uphill from the gate is the finest surviving section of the mighty defensive wall built by Epaminondas.



Eating

Taverna Ithomi

TAVERNA €

(☎27240 51298; www.ithomi.gr; mains €5.50-11; ☀noon-11pm) The pick of a handful of local *kafeneia* (coffee houses) and tavernas, this one offers traditional cuisine with a view over the ruins. Friendly owner Nikos is the local 'man in the know', and besides grilled

meats, he makes a mean *briam* (oven-baked vegetable casserole).

i Getting There & Away

There are two buses between Ancient Messini/Mavromati and Kalamata (€3, one hour, daily except Sundays), one in the early morning, the other in the afternoon, on a changing schedule. Check at Taverna Ithomi.

Koroni

Κορώνη

POP 1700

Koroni (*ko-ro-nih*) is a lovely Venetian port town on Messinia Bay, 43km southwest of Kalamata. Medieval mansions and churches line the town's quaint, narrow and winding streets. These lead to a promontory, on which perches an extensive castle and monastery.

👁 Sights & Activities

Castle

CASTLE

The castle crowns a bluff overlooking the town. Much of it is occupied by the **Timios Prodromos Convent**, so a strict dress code applies. You can enter via the castle's impressive Gothic entrance. The small promontory beyond the castle is a tranquil place for a stroll, with lovely views over the Messinian Gulf to the Taygetos Mountains.

Zaga Beach

BEACH

Koroni's main attraction is Zaga Beach, a 2km sweep of golden sand just south of town. It takes about 20 minutes to walk to here – you can cut through the castle or go via the road. Koroni also sees loggerhead turtles, which lay their eggs near Zaga.

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

The harbourfront street is lined with restaurants.

Hotel Diana

HOTEL €

(☎/fax 27250 22312; www.dianahotel-koroni.gr; d €45; 🍷🍷) This place is blessed (or otherwise) with Byzantine gold-plated bar stools, icons and the like. Rooms are not quite as glossy – they are simple but adequate. It's off the central square, almost on the seafront. Breakfast costs €5.

Camping Koroni

CAMPGROUND €

(☎ 27250 22119; www.koronicamping.com; camp sites per adult/child/tent €8/4/5; 🚻🚻🚻) Located only 200m from Koroni, near the beach. On-site restaurant, washing machines and supermarket; popular with families.

Parthenon

GREEK €

(☎ 27250 22146; mains €7-12; ☺ lunch & dinner) On the waterfront, a block from the main square, this family-run seafront taverna specialises in seafood, along with a supporting cast of classic Greek dishes.

Peroulia Restaurant

GREEK €€

(☎ 27250 41777; www.peroulia.gr; mains €7-15; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Overlooking the teal waters of the gorgeous Peroulia Beach, 6km north of Koroni, this waterfront restaurant has earned a loyal local following for its traditional Greek cuisine and fresh seafood. It does have occasional off-days, but the beach alone is worth the trip. In the grounds of the Colonides Hotel.

i Getting There & Away

Buses will drop you in the central square outside the Church of Agios Dimitrios, one block back from the harbour. There are services to Kalamata (€5, 1½ hours, five daily), Athens (€27.20, four hours, daily) and Pylos (€3.50, 1½ hours, five daily).

Methoni

Μεθώνη

POP 1170

Methoni (*meh-tho-nih*), 12km south of Pylos, was one of the seven cities offered to Achilles by Agamemnon. Homer described it as 'rich in vines'. Today it's a pretty seaside town with a popular beach, next to which looms the most impressive example of a 15th-century Venetian fortress in the Peloponnese.

👁 Sights

Kastro





FORTRESS

(☺ 8am-3pm) **FREE** This vast, crumbling *kastro*, a great example of 15th-century Venetian military architecture, is built on a promontory south of Methoni. It's surrounded on three sides by the sea and separated from the mainland by a dry moat. Enter the inner keep through the mighty gateway to discover a Turkish bath, a cathedral, a house, a cistern and underground passages. A short causeway leads from the fortress to the diminutive octagonal Bourtzi fortress on an adjacent islet.

The medieval port town, which was located within the fortress walls, was the Venetians' first, and their longest-held, possession in the Peloponnese. It was also a stopover for pilgrims en route to the Holy Land.

Sleeping & Eating




Hotel Aris

 27230 31125; s/d/tr €35/40/50;    HOTEL €
Two blocks from the sea and overlooking a tree-lined square, this immaculately clean cheapie is run by kind, helpful owners who don't speak much English.

Hotel Achilles

 27230 31819; www.achilles-hotel.com; Plateia Eleftherias; s/d €60/75;    The smartest of a range of small family hotels in town, Achilles has 13 comfortable, modern rooms and a pleasant outdoor terrace. There's a light, airy dining area, too. Breakfast costs €6.


Taverna Alektor

 27230 31838; mains €7-11;   TAVERNA €
Traditional Greek dishes are served with aplomb by the friendly and accommodating multilingual husband-and-wife team at this central taverna. Live music on Thursdays; linger with a beer or carafe of house wine.


Taverna Klimataria

 27230 31544; Miaouli; mains €7-11;  noon-11pm May-Oct) Locals are in agreement: this is the place to head to for traditional dishes. It's in an old home, with seating on the front porch and in the courtyard. Typical choices include onion pie and stuffed zucchini flowers.

Information

The road from Pylos forks on the edge of town to create Methoni's two main streets, which then run parallel through town to the fortress. As you come from Pylos, the fork to the right is the main street, where there's a National Bank of Greece (and ATE Bank ATM) and a supermarket. The left fork leads directly to the fortress car park, passing the **post office** ( 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) on the way.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart from Methoni from the fork at the Pylos end of town where the two main streets meet. Buses travel to Pylos (€1.60, 15 minutes, three to six daily) and on to Kalamata (€6, 1½ hours). Services also run to Finikounda (€2.60, 15 minutes, one to two daily except Sundays); change there for Koroni, though connections may not match up. The bus to Kalamata stops at Harakopio, 4.5km from Koroni. For bus information call  27230 22230.

Pylos

POP 2760



Coastal Pylos (*pee-loss*), 51km southwest of Kalamata, presides over the southern end of an immense bay. With its huge natural har-

bour that's almost enclosed by the Sfaktiria Islet, its castle and surrounding pine-covered hills, Pylos is not just picturesque but also one of the most historically significant towns in the Peloponnese.

'Sandy Pylos', the Mycenaean kingdom mentioned by Homer, lay a short distance from here, near Gialova Lagoon, and was one of the few places where the Spartans suffered an ignoble defeat at the hands of the Athenians. Also, from this very bay on 20 October 1827, the British, French and Russian fleets, under the command of Admiral Codrington, fired at point-blank range on Ibrahim Pasha's combined Turkish, Egyptian and Tunisian fleet, sinking 53 ships and killing 6000 men, with negligible losses on the Allies' side. The attack was known as the Battle of Navarino (Navarino being the town's former name) and was a decisive moment in the War of Independence.


Sights & Activities

Neo Kastro



 27230 22955; adult/concession €3/2;  8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) CASTLE
The more intact and accessible of two castles that lie on either side of Navarino Bay, this was built by the Turks in 1573 on the hilltop at the southern edge of town, off the road to Methoni. Within its formidable walls is an excellent little **museum** with exhibits on underwater archaeology, a citadel, a mosque converted into a church (under renovation) and a courtyard surrounded by dungeons (used as a prison to contain warring Maniots until the 1900s).

The well-presented museum focuses on the remains of several shipwrecks: the marble columns and stone sarcophagi that were found off the island of Sapienza, near Methoni; and the remains of the *Mentor*, the ship that carried the Parthenon Marbles that then had to be retrieved from the deep.

René Puaux Exhibition

(admission €2;  8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) MUSEUM
Housed in a red mansion on the seafront, this collection of pictures depicts the War of Independence with a focus on the Battle of Navarino. It was donated by René Puaux (1878-1937), who bequeathed porcelain, engravings and lithographs on condition that they be exhibited at Pylos, near the battle's location.

Club Boats

 6972263565, 27230 23155; www.pyloscruises.gr; kiosk on the quay;  Jun-Sep) BOAT TOUR
Runs boat tours around the Bay of Navarino and to Sfaktiria Islet, where silt-covered wrecks of

Πύλος

sunken Turkish ships are discernible in the clear waters. The price depends on the number of passengers, but reckon on about €15 per person (minimum numbers apply).

Sleeping & Eating

There is a much better selection of restaurants clustered along the pedestrianised waterfront in nearby Gialova, 8km north along Navarino Bay.

Tina's House

B&B €

( 27230 23653; www.pylosrooms.com; d incl breakfast €50;  ) A handful of stylish rooms in a bluff-top location, unbeatable views of the bay, a wonderfully friendly hostess and an excellent breakfast make this a superb, homey choice. Bring your own wheels or be prepared for a stiff uphill 15-minute walk from town.



Karalis Beach Hotel

HOTEL €€

( 27230 23021; www.karalisbeach.gr; Paralia; d/tr/f €75/85/160;  ) Pylos' clear winner in the hotel stakes is this intimate little place with 14 compact, stylish rooms, all with wood floors and decorated in tranquil creams. Front rooms have balconies. You'll like this place for the setting alone – under the castle walls, clinging to a cliff over the water.

Koukos

TAVERNA €

( 27230 22950; mains €7.50-11;  lunch & dinner) A plain, unpretentious, good old-fashioned taverna with a loyal local clientele, serving hearty portions of grills and oven-baked dishes on a changing menu. It's a short walk up the hill above the port – ask for directions in the plaza.

Getting There & Away

The KTEL Messinia bus station (27230

22230; www.ktelmessinias.gr) is on the inland side of the central square. From the bus station, there are services to Kalamata (€5, 1¼ hours, four to seven daily); Kyparissia (€6.10, 1¼ hours, two to four daily) via Nestor's Palace (€2, 30 minutes) and Chora (€2, 35 minutes); Methoni (€1.60, 20 minutes, three to four daily); and Athens (€28, five hours, two daily). There's one connection a day for Patra departing Kyparissia.

Gialova

Γιάλοβα



POP 280

The village of Gialova lies 8km north of Pylos on the northeastern edge of Navarino Bay. There's a fine sandy beach and safe swimming in the sheltered waters of the bay. The Gialova Lagoon is a prime birdwatching site in winter.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Erodios

CAMPGROUND €

( 27230 23269; www.erodioss.gr; camp sites per adult/tent/car €7/5/4, 2-/4-bed cabins €65/75; ) Neat as a pin, this campground has a good stretch of beach on Navarino Bay and great facilities. It's northwest of the village on the road leading out to the Gialova Lagoon and Paleokastro.

Zoe Resort

HOTEL €€

( 27230 22025; www.zoeresort.com; r incl breakfast from €70, apt from €90;   ) This once-small family-run place on the seafront near the pier has morphed into an appealing

BIRDWATCHING & THE GIALOVA LAGOON

The best, and most accessible, birdwatching site in the Peloponnese is the Gialova Lagoon. Between September and March the lagoon is home to up to 20,000 assorted waterbirds, while many others pause on their spring migration between Africa and Eastern Europe.

The Hellenic Ornithological Society has recorded here 265 of around 400 species found in Greece, including 79 protected species, 10 species of duck and eight types of heron. Waders descend in their thousands, along with flamingos and glossy ibises. Birds of prey include the internationally threatened imperial eagle, plus ospreys, peregrine falcons and harriers. Birds aside, 28 types of mammal and 26 species of reptile also call the lagoon's environs home.

The lagoon and associated wetlands cover 700 hectares at the northern end of Navarino Bay, separated from the bay by a narrow spit of land leading out to Koryphasion Hill. They are fed by two freshwater streams that flow into the reed beds on the northern and eastern flanks of the lagoon and empty into Navarino Bay, below Koryphasion Hill.

The wetlands and surrounding coastal habitats were declared a protected area in 1997. The old pump house has been converted into an information centre staffed by volunteers in summer and is the starting point for a walking trail that guides visitors through a range of habitats.

resort. We like the older hotel rooms with the small front balconies, although they're potentially noisy if Zoe's outdoor taverna rocks on. The resort section is modern, but the service can be a little chaotic.

★ Elia

MEDITERRANEAN €

(☎ 27230 23503; www.elia-gialova.gr; mains €6-15; ☺ Feb-Oct; 🍷🍷) Gourmet Greek meets contemporary Mediterranean eatery. The outstanding smoked pork and orzo pasta with seafood is matched by the ambience, trendy designer lights and flower boxes.

★ La Cucina Italiana

ITALIAN €€

(☎ 27230 23301; mains €7-17; ☺ 6.30pm-late) From the seasonal *spaghetti vongole* (with clams) and chicken sautéed with oranges and honey, to the ample servings of *pizza piccante*, this Italian restaurant really delivers. The sea views from the upstairs terrace are complemented by friendly service, and a free glass of sparkling wine comes accompanies the noteworthy desserts.

📍 Getting There & Away

There are four buses a day south to Pylos (€2, 15 minutes) and up to six daily north to Kyparissia via Nestor's Palace and Chora. A taxi between Gialova and Pylos costs around €15.

Around Gialova

★ Paleokastro

RUIN

The ruins of this ancient castle, built by the Franks in the 13th century on the site of the acropolis of Ancient Pylos, lie 5km west of Gialova on rugged **Koryphasion Hill**, a formidable natural defensive position overlooking the northern entrance to Navarino Bay.

The castle (officially closed) can be explored with care; avoid falling down cisterns hidden by overgrowth. The views from the top are magnificent. The road out to the castle is signposted on the northern edge of the village.

Follow signs to Paleokastro, where the road ends in a little car park. From there you'll find two ways of reaching the castle: the left-hand path (20 minutes) skirts Koryphasion Hill and gradually leads up to the entrance. The other route (40 minutes) is signposted 'Nestor's Cave'; the path skirts the lagoon before leading towards Voidokilia Beach through the sand dunes; a fork in the path leads up towards the cave where Hermes hid Apollo's cattle, according to the legend. From the cave, it's a tough scramble

up to the castle's crumbling battlements, rewarded by views of the perfect crescent of the beach below.

Voidokilia Beach

BEACH

This perfect, sandy crescent with clear waters is presumed to be Homer's 'sandy Pylos', where Telemachus was warmly welcomed when he came to ask wise old King Nestor the whereabouts of his long-lost father, Odysseus, King of Ithaca.

Follow the signs to Paleokastro and walk the lagoonside track labelled 'Nestor's Cave' from the Paleokastro car park (20 minutes) or approach by road from the village of Petrohori, 6km north of Gialova off the road to Chora.

Nestor's Palace

RUIN

(☎ 27630 31437) The best preserved of all Mycenaean palaces lies 17km north of modern Pylos. It is described in Homer's *Odyssey* as the court of the mythical hero Nestor, who took part in the voyage of the Argonauts and sent 90 ships to fight in the Trojan War. Originally a two-storey building, the palace's walls stand 1m high, giving a good idea of the layout of a Mycenaean palace complex.

At the time of writing, renovations of the palace were ongoing.

The main palace, in the middle, was a building of many rooms. The largest room, the throne room, was where the king dealt with state business. In its centre was a large, circular hearth surrounded by four ornate columns that supported a 1st-floor balcony. Surrounding the throne is the sentry box, pantry, waiting room, a vestibule and, most fascinating, a bathroom with a terracotta tub still in place where, according to legend, Polycaste, Nestor's youngest daughter, bathed the hero Telemachus.

Some of the palace frescoes and some of the Linear B script tablets – the first to be discovered on the mainland – are housed in the museum in the nearby village of Chora.

Chora Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 27632 31358; adult €2; ☺ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) This little museum, 4km northeast of Nestor's Palace in the village of Chora, houses finds from the palace site and other Mycenaean weaponry, jewellery and pottery from tombs around Messinia. The prize pieces are the incomplete frescoes from the throne rooms at Nestor's Palace and the Linear B tablets (the latter are copies).

Buses from Pylos to Kyparissia stop at Chora. If driving, follow signs for Kalamata.

OLYMPIA ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑ

Most people come to Olympia for one reason: to visit the historically important and impressive site of Ancient Olympia, birthplace of the Olympic Games. Otherwise the surrounding region of Elia (Ελιά) is largely agricultural.

Ancient Elia took its name from the mythical King Helios. Its capital was the city of Elis, now a forgotten ruin on the road from Gastouni to Lake Pinios. When the Franks arrived, they made Andravida the capital of their principate of Morea. Pyrgos is the underwhelming modern capital.

Getting There & Around

From the **KTEL bus terminal** (☎ 26210 20600; www.ktelileias.gr) in Pyrgos, there are services to Athens (€27.70, four hours, up to 10 daily), Patra (€9, two hours, up to 10 daily), Andritsena (€6.20, two hours, two daily except Friday and Sunday), Kalamata (€13.10, two hours, two daily) and Olympia (€2.20, 30 minutes, eight to 13 daily).

There's also a small train that runs on the branch line from Pyrgos to Olympia.

Olympia

POP 1000

The compact modern village of Olympia (o-lim-bee-ah), lined with souvenir shops and eateries, caters to the coach-loads of tourists who pass through on their way to the most famous sight in the Peloponnese: Ancient Olympia. This is where myth and fact merge: it's where Zeus allegedly held the first Olympic Games to celebrate beating his father Cronos at wrestling. This is also birthplace of the ideal that still brings states together and makes them put aside their differences for the sake of friendly athletic competition, just as it did more than 4000 years ago.

Just 500m south of the village, across the Kladeos River, the remains of Ancient Olympia rest amid luxurious greenery. As you walk around, or stand at the starting line of the ancient stadium, you may contemplate the influence of this site through millennia. This is where they still light the Olympic Flame every four years. This is where the Games began.

Sights

A handy website to the area is www.ancientolympiahotels.gr.

Ancient Olympia

HISTORIC SITE

(☎ 26240 22517; adult/concession €6/3, site & museum €9/5; ☀ 8am-8pm) The Olympic Games took place here for at least 1000 years, held every four years until their abolition by Emperor Theodosius I in AD 393. Today, the Olympic flame continues to be lit here for the modern Games. Thanks to the destruction ordered by Theodosius II and various subsequent earthquakes, little remains of the magnificent temples and athletic facilities, but enough exists to give you a hint of this World Heritage-listed sanctuary's former glory. The ancient site is a signposted five-minute walk from the modern village.

Wandering amid the tree-shaded ruins, you can almost picture the blood and smoke of oxen sacrificed to Zeus and Hera; the sweaty, oiled-up athletes waiting inside the original stadium; the jostling crowds; and the women and slaves watching the proceedings from a nearby hill. It's worth remembering that some buildings precede others by centuries; a visit to the archaeological museum beforehand will provide context and help with visualising the ancient buildings.

The first ruin encountered is the **gymnasium**, which dates from the 2nd century BC. South of here are the columns of the partly restored **palaestra** (wrestling school), where contestants practised and trained. The next building was the **theokoleon** (priests' house). Behind it is **Pheidias' workshop**, where the gargantuan ivory-and-gold Statue of Zeus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was sculpted. The workshop was identified by archaeologists after the discovery of tools and moulds. Beyond the theokoleon is the **leonidaion**, an elaborate structure that accommodated dignitaries.

The Altis, or **Sacred Precinct of Zeus**, lies east of the path. Its most important building was the immense 5th-century Doric **Temple of Zeus**, which enshrined Pheidias' statue, later removed to Constantinople by Theodosius II (where it was destroyed by fire in AD 475). One column of the temple has been restored and re-erected, and helps put into perspective the sheer size of the structure.

South of the Temple of Zeus is the **bouleuterion** (council house), which contains the **altar of oaths**, where competitors swore to abide by the rules decreed by the Olympic Senate and not to commit foul play.



The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games were undoubtedly the ancient world's biggest sporting event and remain for most athletes today the biggest of dreams. Then, as now, the Games made warring states temporarily halt their squabbles, and victorious competitors won great fame and considerable fortune.

Origins of the Games

Some Ancient Greek texts attribute the founding of the Games to the hero Pelops; others name Hercules as the founder who made Zeus the patron god of the Olympic sanctuary. The first official quadrennial Olympic Games were declared in 776 BC by King Iphitos of Elis, took place around the first full moon in August, reaching the height of their prestige in 576 BC.

During the ancient Games, writers, poets and historians read their works to

large audiences; traders clinched business deals; and city-state leaders attempted to resolve differences through diplomacy.

Olympic Qualifications

In Ancient Greece only free-born Greek males were allowed to compete in the Games; the Romans changed the rules to include Roman citizens. Slaves and women were not allowed to enter the Olympic sanctuary even as spectators; women trying to sneak in were thrown from Mt Tropaion. Today's Summer Olympics includes athletes from 204 countries, with 88 countries competing in the Winter Olympics.

Demise & Rebirth

During Roman times the Games declined. Held for the last time in AD 393, they were banned by Emperor Theodosius I as part of a purge of pagan festivals.



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2

LOUISA GOULAMAKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES ©

1. Wall mural depicting athletes
2. Lighting the flame in Ancient Olympia in preparation for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games
3. Helliniko Olympic complex, part of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games site



3

SIMON DANSON / BLOOMBERG / GETTY IMAGES ©

The modern Olympic Games were instituted in 1896 and, except during WWI and WWII, have been held every four years around the world ever since. The Olympic flame is lit at the ancient site and carried by runners to the city where the Games are held.

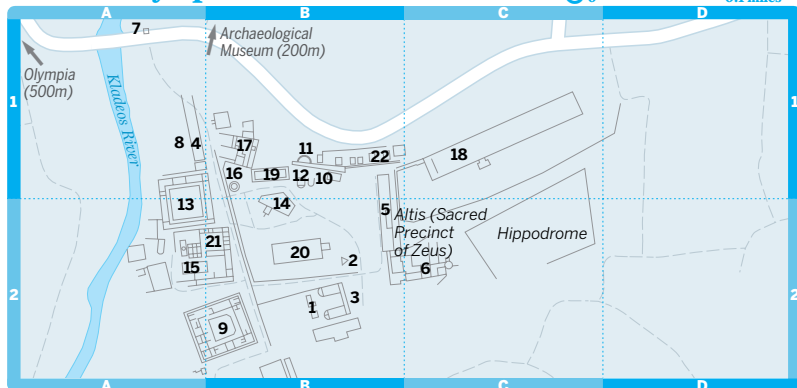
Scandal & Controversies

Throughout history the Olympics has been marred by scandals. These range from the farcical – Emperor Nero entering the chariot race in AD 67 with 10 horses, ordering that other competitors could only have four, falling off and still being declared winner – to the serious, including Israeli athletes being murdered by Palestinian group Black September in 1972, and Hitler refusing to award gold medals to African American sprinter Jesse Owens in 1936.

ANCIENT OLYMPICS VS MODERN OLYMPICS

- Contemporary opening ceremonies may involve such displays as James Bond parachuting in. In Ancient Greece, it was all about sacrificing oxen to Zeus.
- Ancient Greek events included wrestling, chariot and horse racing, the pentathlon (three foot races, the long jump and the discus), javelin, boxing and pankration (few-holds-barred fighting). Today's Summer Olympics have been joined by the Winter Olympics; a total of 56 events across both games include modified sprinting, equestrian, boxing and wrestling.
- Victorious ancient Olympians were crowned with sacred olive branches and enjoyed tax exemption and other privileges. Modern Olympians receive medals, TV fame and sponsorship fortune.

Ancient Olympia



Ancient Olympia

1	Altar of Oaths	B2
2	Base of Victory	B2
3	Bouleuterion (Council House)	B2
4	East Portico of the Gymnasium	A1
5	Echo Portico	B2
6	Emperor Nero's Villa	C2
7	Entrance	A1
8	Gymnasium	A1
9	Leonidaion	B2
10	Metroön	B1
11	Nymphaeum	B1
12	Olympic Flame	B1
13	Palaestra (Wrestling School)	A2
14	Pelopion	B2
15	Pheidias' Workshop	A2
16	Philippeion	B1
17	Prytaneum	B1
18	Stadium	C1
19	Temple of Hera	B1
20	Temple of Zeus	B2
21	Theokoleon (Priest's House)	B2
22	Treasuries	B1

East of the temple is the **echo portico**, with a Doric colonnade leading towards the stadium. Its remarkable acoustics meant that a sound uttered within was repeated seven times. Just east of the portico are the remains of a lavish **villa** used by Emperor Nero during his participation in the Games in AD 67; it replaced the original Sanctuary of Hestia.

The **stadium** lies to the east of the Altis and is entered through a stone archway. It's rectangular, unlike today's stadiums, and the stone start and finish lines of the 120m sprint track and the judges' seats still survive. The stadium could seat at least 45,000 spectators. Slaves and women spectators,

however, had to be content to watch from outside on the Hill of Kronos.

To the north of the Temple of Zeus was the **pelopion**, a small, wooded hillock with an altar to Pelops, the first hero of the Olympic Games. It was surrounded by a wall containing the remains of its Doric portico. Many artefacts now displayed in the museum were found on the hillock.

Further north is the 6th-century Doric **Temple of Hera**, the site's most intact structure. Hera was worshipped along with Rea until the two were superseded by Zeus. The Hermes statue was found here.

To the east of this temple is the **nymphaeum** (AD 156–60), erected by the wealthy Roman banker Herodes Atticus. Typical of buildings financed by Roman benefactors, it was grandiose, consisting of a semicircular building with Doric columns flanked at each side by a circular temple. The building contained statues of Herodes Atticus and his family, though Zeus took centre stage. Despite its elaborate appearance, the nymphaeum had a practical purpose; it was a fountain house supplying Olympia with fresh spring water.

Just in front of the nymphaeum is the spot where the altar of Hestia would have maintained a continuous **fire** during the Games, symbolising the fire stolen from the gods by Prometheus; fires were also lit in the temples of Zeus and Hera. Today, the **Olympic Flame** is lit where the Temple of Hestia once stood.

Beyond the nymphaeum and up a flight of stone steps, a row of 12 **treasuries** stretched to the stadium, each erected by a city-state for use as a storehouse for offerings to the

gods; these were mainly used to advertise the city-state's prestige and wealth.

At the bottom of these steps are the scant remains of the 5th-century-BC **metroön**, a temple dedicated to Rea, the mother of the gods. Apparently the ancients worshipped Rea in this temple with orgies.

The foundations of the **philippeion**, west of the Temple of Hera, are the remains of a circular construction with Ionic columns built by Philip of Macedon to commemorate the Battle of Chaironeia (338 BC), where he defeated a combined army of Athenians and Thebans. The building contained gold-and-ivory-covered statues of Philip and his family, including his son, Alexander the Great.

North of the philippeion was the **prytaneum**, the magistrate's residence. Here, winning athletes were entertained and feasted.

★ Archaeological Museum MUSEUM
(adult/concession €6/3; ☺ 8am-8pm) This superb museum at Ancient Olympia features finds from the archaeological site. Visiting it before touring the ruins helps to put the ancient site and its buildings into perspective. The museum's exhibits span the Olympic sanctuary's history, from the prehistoric to the Roman periods. Artefacts include increasingly sophisticated ceramics, votive offerings to Zeus and Hera, sacrificial cauldron adornments and statuary from the Temple of Hera. The main hall dramatically displays the biggest highlight: reassembled pediments and metopes from the Temple of Zeus.

Among the museum's treasures, you may spot a tiny helmet (a votive offering), a bronze arm protector decorated with the face of the Gorgon Medusa, a tiny bronze figure of Silenus (tutor to Dionysis, the god of wine) featuring optimistically proportioned genitalia, and a 4th-century Parian marble statue of Hermes of Praxiteles, a masterpiece of classical sculpture from the Temple of Hera.

The pediments and metopes from the Temple of Zeus deserve some extra attention. The **eastern pediment** depicts the chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos, while the **western pediment** shows the fight between the centaurs and Lapiths at the wedding feast of Pirithous (the centaurs got drunk and tried to abduct the women). The **metopes** depict the Twelve Labours of Hercules; half the fun is trying to work out which is which from the remains alone.

Museum of the History of the Olympic Games in Antiquity MUSEUM
(adult/concession €2/1; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon, 8am-3pm Tue-Fri) Beautifully presented displays depict the history of the world's most prestigious sporting competition. Learn about its core original events (foot racing, wrestling, boxing and chariot racing); why it's associated with Hercules (or Pelops); and what fate befell women who tried to watch the Games despite prohibitions. The sculptures, mosaics, pottery art and votive offerings all pay tribute to athletes and athleticism. Other Games – Heraean, Nemean, Panathenaic, Pythian and Isthmian – also get a mention.

Tours

To really make the site come alive, it's well worth considering hiring a guide, especially if there are a few of you. Tours usually include both the site and the Archaeological Museum, but any preference will be catered for. Recommended guides include **Niki Vlachou** (☎ 6972426085; www.olympictours.gr; 4½hr tour incl museum from €40 per person), who speaks English and French; **Agelos Koutras** (☎ 26240 22602); and **Marieta Kolotourou** (☎ 26250 23596), who speaks English and Spanish.

Sleeping

Hotel Pelops HOTEL €
(☎ 26240 22543; www.hotelpelops.gr; Varela 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast €40/50/70; 🍷🍷🍷) Opposite the church, this is among the town's best contenders, with comfortable rooms. The delightful Greek-Australian owners, the Spiliopoulos family, provide friendly, knowledgeable service and a decent breakfast. And, hurrah, there are tea and coffee facilities in each room.

Hotel Kronio HOTEL €
(☎ 26240 22188; www.hotelkronio.gr; Tsoureka 1; s/d/tr incl breakfast €40/53/70; 🍷🍷🍷) The helpful, multilingual owner, Panagiotis, is a bonus at this pleasant spot that has excellent-value bright and airy rooms.

Best Western Europa HOTEL €€
(☎ 26240 22650; www.hoteleuropa.gr; Drouva 1; s/d/tr incl breakfast €70/90/100; 🍷🍷🍷) This family-run franchise is popular with groups and families. Rooms have blond wood and mod cons; larger rooms with balcony vistas are more luxurious. A bar, swimming pool, a decent poolside taverna under the olive trees, and excellent service seal the deal.

Arty Grand Hotel

HOTEL €€
 (☎26240 26000; www.artygrandhotel.gr; d/tr/ste €90/105/128; 📍🚶🚰🚰) Though its hilltop location, 800m from the ruins, means that the hotel is somewhat isolated, its spacious rooms are comfortable, the service is pleasant and the pool and spa are nice luxury touches. The restaurant is nothing special, though. Popular with tour groups.

Eating

Olympia's many tavernas cater largely to the lunchtime coach crowds and, as such, most lack incentive to strive for excellence.

Self-caterers will find a good supermarket near the ELIN petrol station.

★ Taverna Bacchus

TAVERNA €
 (☎26240 22298; www.bacchustaverna.gr; Ancient Pissa; mains €7-13; ☺lunch & dinner; 📍🚶🚰🚰) Bacchus, the god of wine, has extended his portfolio to include delectable delights with fresh ingredients in this smart stone taverna in nearby Ancient Pissa. Standout dishes include meatballs with rice; if you accept a complimentary carafe of house wine from the owner, you may also wish to book one of Bacchus' luxurious rooms (double/triple €60/70) with pool access.

Agean

GREEK €
 (☎26240 22540; G Doyma 4; mains €7-12; ☺lunch & dinner; 🚶) One of a cluster of tavernas on the main square, Agean distinguishes itself by its extensive array of vegetarian dishes served alongside Greek favourites.

★ Garden Taverna

GREEK €€
 (☎26240 22650; Best Western Hotel Europa International; mains €9.50-15; ☺lunch & dinner May-Sep; 📍) Under olive trees in a tranquil garden overlooking the valley below, this restaurant is the most original in Olympia. Alongside the excellent grilled meats you'll find the likes of pasta in vodka cream sauce with smoked salmon and dill. The service is prompt and attentive. Lunch is light bites only.

i Information

National Bank of Greece (cnr Praxitelous Kondyli & Stefanopoulou)

Post office (Pierre Coubertin 3)

i Getting There & Away**BUS**

Buses depart from in front of the train station. There are services to Pyrgos (€2.30, 30 min-

utes, eight to 13 daily), with four or five handy Athens connections, and to Tripoli (€14.30, three hours). Note: for tickets to Tripoli, reserve your seat with KTEL Pyrgos (p173) one day prior to travel; hotels will call on your behalf.

TRAIN

Olympia train services head to/from Pyrgos only – there are five departures daily (€2, 30 minutes).

Andritsena**Ανδρίτσαινα**

POP 580

Once the home of Panayotis Anagastopoulos, one of the leaders in the War of Independence, Andritsena sits on a hillside overlooking the valley of the Alfios River, 65km southeast of Pyrgos. Crumbling stone houses flank the village's narrow cobbled streets and a stream bubbles its way through the central square, Plateia Agnostopoulou. Andritsena is a handy springboard for visiting the magnificent Temple of Epicurean Apollo at Vasses.

👁 Sights**★ Temple of Epicurean****Apollo at Vasses**

HISTORIC SITE

(☎26260 22275; adult/concession €3/2; ☺8am-8pm) Situated 14km southwest of Andritsena, on a wild, isolated spot overlooking rugged mountains and hills, the World Heritage-listed Vasses and its Temple of Epicurean Apollo is one of Greece's most atmospheric archaeological sites. The striking, well-preserved temple is robbed of some of its splendour and immediate visual impact by the giant steel-girded tent that's been protecting it from the elements since 1987 for restoration purposes, but it's magnificent all the same.

The temple was built in 420 BC by the people of nearby Figalia, who dedicated it to Apollo Epicurus (the Helper) for delivering them from the plague. Designed by Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, the temple combines Doric and Ionic columns and a single Corinthian column – the earliest example of this order.

The temple's most prominent decoration – a marble frieze depicting battles between Greeks and Amazons, and between Lapiths and Centaurs – was spirited away in 1814 by 'archaeologists' who procured it from Greece's Ottoman rulers and sold it to the British Museum, where it is currently displayed.

No public buses run to Vasses. A return taxi from Andritsena, including waiting time, costs around €40.

Nikolopoulos Andritsena

Library

LIBRARY, MUSEUM

(☎26260 22242; ☎8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat) **FREE**

In 1838 Konstantinos Nikopoulos, a composer, archaeologist and member of the Greek Resistance looking to liberate Greece from the Turks, donated 4000 rare books to his father's home town to establish a school. It was one of Europe's largest private book collections at the time. Displayed along with manuscripts from Greece's 1821 Independence movement is a cast of a frieze from the Temple of Epicurean Apollo at Vasses. Explanatory English video. It's behind Hotel Theoxenia.

Sleeping & Eating

For somewhere to eat, try any of the casual tavernas and grill places spread along the main street.

Archontico Hotel

HOTEL €€

(☎26260 22401; www.archontiko-andritsenas.gr; d€60; 🍷🍴) Complete with terraces and artfully scattered amphorae, this fine historic building at the western end of the village offers snug rooms with exposed stone walls and mod cons.

Getting There & Away

Buses run to Athens (€24, two hours, one or two daily) via Megalopoli, Tripoli and Corinth Isthmus.

Kyllini

Κυλλίνη

The port of Kyllini (kih-lee-nih), 78km southwest of Patra, is the jumping-off point for ferries to Kefallonia and Zakynthos. Most people arrive on buses from Patra to board the ferries.

Ionian Ferries (www.ionianferries.gr) runs to Zakynthos (€7.50/28.50 per adult/car, 1¼ hours, four daily in summer) and to Poros (€8.80/37.90 per person/car, 1½ hours, one to two daily in summer) on Kefallonia.

Two daily buses run to Kyllini from Pyrgos (€6, one hour), and three to four buses daily run from the KTEL Zakynthos bus station in Patra (€8, 1¼ hours). Some connect with ferries to Zakynthos (bus and ferry €15.90). Note, however, when doing the reverse trip there are no buses from Kyllini to Patra. A taxi to Patra costs around €60.

WORTH A TRIP

WINERY STOPOVER

Mercouri Estate (☎26210 41601; www.mercouri.gr; tastings €10; ☎9am-3pm Mon-Sat), 1km north of Korakohori village and about 15km from Pyrgos, is a worthwhile winery for a stop-off. This handsome estate produces a dry white *foloi*, and a prize-winning rich red, its flagship Domaine Mercouri. It also runs tours of the grounds (reservations required).

ACHAÏA

ΑΧΑΪΑ

The northern region of Achaïa comprises some high and skiable mountain country (reached via a historic rack-and-pinion railway), surprisingly little in the way of beaches, and a bustling port, Patra.

Achaïa owes its name to the Achaeans, an Indo-European branch of migrants who settled on mainland Greece and established the mighty Mycenaean civilisation. When the Dorians arrived, the Achaeans were pushed into this northwestern corner of the Peloponnese, displacing the original Ionians.

Legend has it that the Achaeans founded 12 cities, which later developed into the powerful Achaean Federation that survived until Roman times. Principal among these cities were the ports of Patra and Egio (on the coast of the Gulf of Corinth).

Patra (Patras)

Πάτρα

POP 168,000

Let's face it: Patra is unlikely to be your final destination or a place you'll linger long. Most travellers pass straight through, boarding or disembarking from boats that sail between here, Italy and some Ionian Islands.

The largest city in the Peloponnese, Patra is named after King Patreas who ruled Achaïa around 1100 BC. Little is evident of this busy port's 3000 years of history, during which it was an important trade centre under the Mycenaean and the Romans. There's a darker side to Patra: the derelict buildings, groups of unemployed men hanging out by the docks and beggars contrast sharply with the attractive squares and lively pedestrian streets, and the bars and restaurants filled with the young and the trendy.



Before you escape by boat or via the Rio-Andirio suspension bridge, an engineering

feat that links the city with western continental Greece, it's worth making the most of Patra's saving grace: the most diverse eating and nightlife scene in the Peloponnese, helped by the presence of Patra's 20,000 university students.

Sights & Activities

★ **Archaeological Museum of Patras**


MUSEUM

( 2610 420 645; www.patrasmuseum.gr; Patras-Athens National Rd 38-40; admission €4;  8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) This space-age museum, the country's second largest, displays a thorough collection of regional objects from prehistoric to Roman times across three vast themed halls: Private Life, Public Life and Cemeteries. You may spot some extraordinary mosaics, barnacle-encrusted amphorae, duck-shaped *askos* vessels, coin hoards, a gold ring decorated with a tiny phallus, oil lamps featuring erotic scenes, elaborate marble sarcophagi, Mycenaean bronze swords from warrior burials and four skulls with funeral wreaths intact.

The museum is several kilometres north of the centre.

Kastro

CASTLE

( 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) **FREE** The *kastro* stands on the site of the acropolis of ancient Patrai. The Romans were the first to build a fort here around AD 550, but the present structure is of Frankish origin, remodelled many times over the centuries by the Byzantines, Venetians and Turks. Set in an attractive pencil-pine park, it is reached by climbing the 190-plus steps at the south-eastern end of Agio Nikolaou. Great views of Zakynthos and Kefallonia are the reward.

Church of Agios Andreas

CHURCH

(Agiou Andreou) Seating 5500 people, this church is one of the largest in the Balkans. It houses religious icons and paintings, plus St Andreas' skull, along with part of the cross on which he was crucified.

★ ★ **Festivals & Events**

Patras Carnival

CARNIVAL




(www.carnivalpatras.gr) Patra's citizens party hard during the annual Patras Carnival. The program begins in mid-January, and features a host of minor events leading up to a wild weekend of costume parades, colourful floats and celebrations in late February or early March.

Sleeping

Prices double at Carnival time; book well in advance.




Pension Nicos

HOTEL €

( 2610 623 757; cnr Patreos 3 & Agiou Andreou 121; s/d/tr €30/40/55, s/d without bathroom €25/35;  ) This 1960s-style budget option on a busy street has flaking shutters on the outside, but inside Nicos runs a tight ship with clean rooms on several floors and a roof terrace.




★ **City Loft Boutique Hotel**

APARTMENT €€

( 2610 223 552; www.cityloft.gr; Valtetsiou 6; 1-/2-/3-person apt €75/110/130;  ) Sleek and stylish apartments in white or black on a quiet side street several blocks north of the main square. Perks include high-quality bed linens, king-sized beds with orthopaedic mattresses, balconies and a small, attractive garden.

Maison Grecque

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

( 2610 241 212; www.mghotels.gr; 25 Martiou 116; s/d/ste incl breakfast €65/85/180;  ) This smart boutique spot has a touch of 'sleek Greek' pretension. Each room is decked out uniquely (with an original ceiling fresco or two thrown in) – think dark hues with metallic touches. A couple of the rooms have very small windows. The rest, however, are sophisticated and smart. It's a five-minute walk from the pedestrianised centre.

Hotel Byzantino

HOTEL €€





( 2610 243 000; www.byzantino-hotel.gr; Riga Fereou 106; s/d/tr incl breakfast €75/85/100;  ) In a restored neoclassical building on the lively main pedestrian street, this small hotel features appealing rooms with fancy bedsteads, wooden floors and period furniture. There's a popular cafe downstairs.

Eating & Drinking

Trendy cafes, bars and restaurants line the pedestrianised Riga Fereou (Michalakopoulou), the surrounding side streets and Agiou Nikolaou. Cheap student eateries are along Gerokostopoulou.

Labyrinth

GREEK €

( 26102 26436; Poukevil 44; mains €6.50-12;  noon-5.30pm & 8.30pm-1am Mon-Sat;  ) Inside the rough stone walls of this 80-year-old family restaurant, you can expect classics such as *briam*, dolmadhes and beef casserole, as well as roasted lamb sweetbreads and intestines for the adventurous epicurean.

Patra

★ **Salumeria**

FUSION €€

(Pantanassis 27; mains €11-13; ☺ lunch & dinner; 🚶) On a pedestrian street, this chichi bistro with exposed stone walls offers a departure from Greek cuisine with the likes of smoked salmon with black lentils and seared calamari with sweet potato and wilted greens. In the evenings it's a popular wine bar.

Bodegas Wine Bar

WINE BAR

(☎ 2610 221 113; Riga Feraïou 147; ☺ lunch & dinner) Whether you're nursing a margarita or a glass of wine from the extensive list of Greek vintages, this stylish bar is a spot worth lin-

gering. Salads come in an enormous bowl the size of Epidavros Theatre.

i Information

Internet cafes are plentiful around Plateia Olgas.

First aid centre (☎ 2610 277 386; cnr Karolou & Agiou Dionysiou; ☺ 8am-8pm)

National Bank of Greece (Plateia Trion Symahon; ☺ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the train station.

Post office (cnr Zaïmi & Mezonos; ☺ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun)

Tourist police (☎ 2610 695 191; Gounari 52; ☺ 7.30am-9pm)

i Getting There & Away

BOAT

The passenger port is 1km south of town. Ferry boats are located at the port, and there are also boat agencies located along waterfront Othonos Amalias and its northern extension, Iroñ Polytehnioi. Ferry schedules and prices change seasonally; ring ahead. There are no ferries directly to Corfu; ferries to Corfu depart from Igoumenitsa only.

Domestic

Patra is the departure point for ferry services to Kefallonia and Ithaki.

Strintzis Lines (☎ 2610 240 000; www.strintzisferries.gr) has services to Sami, on Kefallonia, (€18.20/50 per person/car, three hours, two daily). The same service continues to Vathy, on Ithaki, once daily (€18.60/55, 3¼ hours).

International

Patra is Greece's main port for ferry services to Italy, with departures to Ancona, Bari and Venice. Some ferries may stop at Igoumenitsa and Corfu; no free stopovers permitted.

Superfast Ferries/Blue Star Ferries (☎ 2610 623 574; www.superfast.com; Othonos Amalias 12), **ANEK Lines** (☎ 21041 97400; www.anek.gr; cnr Othonos Amalias & Aratou) and **Minoan Lines** (☎ 2610 426 000; www.minoan.gr; Iroñ Politehnioi 50) run trips to Ancona (from €71, 21 to 24 hours), Bari (from €81, 15½ hours) and Venice (from €77, 31 hours). Some Minoan Lines services continue to Trieste.

Note: we give prices for deck seats; prices are higher for airline seats and cabins. Check up-to-date schedules on websites.

BUS

The **KTEL Achaia bus station** (☎ 2610 623 886; www.ktelachaias.gr; Othonos Amalias 4) has services to the following places:

Athens (€19, three hours, every 30 minutes) via Diakofto and Corinth Isthmus (€12.60, 1½ hours)

Ioannina (€24, 4½ hours, two daily)

Kalamata (€23, four hours, two daily)

Kalavryta (€7, two hours, at least two daily)

Pyrgos (€9, two hours, up to 10 daily)

Thessaloniki (€45, seven hours, three daily)

Buses link the KTEL Achaia bus station in Patra with Terminal A (aka Kifissos) in Athens, from where there are frequent buses to/from the international airport.

The **KTEL Kefallonia bus station** (☎ 2610 274 938; www.ktelkefaloniais.gr; Othonos Amalias 58) has services to the Ionian islands of Lefkada (€16.20, three hours, twice weekly) and Kefallonia (€21.10, one daily). To continue on to Argostoli, travel by bus from Kefallonia to the port of

Kyllini, from where you catch a ferry to Poros (1½ hours) and continue again by road to Argostoli (one hour). Buses also depart KTEL Kefallonia bus station to Amfissa (for Delphi; €13, three hours, two daily Monday to Friday, one on Saturday and Sunday) and to Tripoli (€18.90, one to two daily Friday and Sunday).

The **KTEL Zakynthos bus station** (☎ 2610 220 993; www.ktel-zakynthos.gr; Othonos Amalias 84) has services to Zakynthos, via the port of Kyllini (including ferry €16, 3½ hours, two to three daily).

TRAIN

There are six trains a day to Athens (€17). At the time of writing, a replacement bus goes as far as Kiato, from where you take the *proastiako*, Athens' local train service. Note: on arrival in Athens you can use your *proastiako* ticket for 1½ hours on the metro (validate it first).

i Getting Around

Hertz (☎ 26102 20990; www.hertz.gr; Akti Dimiaion 40) Recommended, reliable car-hire outlet.

Kalavryta

Καλάβρυτα

POP 1800

Perched 756m above sea level, Kalavryta (kah-lah-vrih-tah) is a delightful little town with fresh mountain air, gushing springs and a square that nestles under giant plane trees. Though in existence for centuries, the present-day town came into being on the ruins of ancient Kinaitha in the mid-19th century. The town is a popular ski-season destination among Athenians, who also come for weekend getaways year round. In spring and summer, visitors from abroad come here to hike and visit the nearby monasteries.

Two relatively recent historical events have assured Kalavryta a place in the hearts of all Greeks. First, despite plenty of evidence that fighting had already begun elsewhere, the official version of the War of Independence states that the revolt against the Turks began here on 25 March 1821, when Bishop Germanos of Patra raised the Greek flag at Moni Agias Lavras (p185), a monastery 5km from town. Second, on 13 December 1943, in one of the worst atrocities of WWII, the Nazis massacred most of the village's male inhabitants as part of their scorched-earth Operation Kalavryta, designed to punish Kalavryta partisans in particular for the deaths of German prisoners of war. The hands of the old cathedral clock stand eternally at 2.34pm, the time the German guns finally fell silent.

Sights

★ Museum of the Kalavryta

Holocaust

MUSEUM

(☎26920 23646; www.dmko.gr; 1-5 Syngrou; admission €3; ☀9am-4pm Tue-Sun) The country's only Holocaust museum, this is a powerful tribute to the residents of Kalavryta who perished in the 13 December 1943 slaughter perpetrated by the Nazis. It's a dignified, understated, yet extremely evocative account of the struggle between the occupying forces and partisan fighters in the area, and the events running up to the massacre – an atrocity reported to be partly put in motion by the partisans' execution of a group of German prisoners.

Set inside the rebuilt old schoolhouse that was set on fire with women, children and the elderly inside, the museum depicts the history of 19th- and 20th-century Kalavryta, the advent of the rack-and-pinion railway and the region's suffering during WWII through evocative photographs and personal effects.

ELAS, the Greek resistance movement, was very active in the Kalavryta region during WWII. On 17 October 1943 partisans captured a German battalion. Negotiations stalled when the Nazis launched 'Operation Kalavryta,' designed to crush the resistance. The partisans killed the German prisoners and in retaliation, on 13 December 1943, the Nazis herded 468 men and boys over the age of thirteen to the nearby Kappi Ridge and gunned them down. The women and children who managed to break out of the burning schoolhouse were left with the task of gathering and burying the dead, as commemorated by the statues behind the schoolhouse.

Whatever you do, don't pass by the videos on continuous loop dotted throughout the exhibition. These are the accounts of surviving townspeople who escaped death, some of whom were children at the time. The walls covered with pictures of the dead Kalavryta villagers and the names of the dead is an especially stark memorial.

Martyrs' Monument

MONUMENT

A huge white cross on a cypress-covered hillside just east of town marks the site where the Nazis machine-gunned 486 men and boys from Kalavryta on 13 December 1943. Only 13 survived the massacre. Beneath this imposing monument is a poignant little shrine to the victims. It's signposted off Konstantinou.

KALAVRYTA CITYPASS




For bargain sightseeing in and around Kalavryta, the **Kalavryta CityPass** (www.trainose.gr) discount card covers a return trip on the Diakofto–Kalavryta railway and entrance to the Cave of the Lakes, the Kalavryta Holocaust Museum, and either Kalavryta Ski Centre or the Tetramythos Winery, saving you 40% overall. The card costs €24.80, is valid for a month and can be purchased at Kalavryta, Diakofto or Patra train stations.

Sleeping

Lodges are dotted outside Kalavryta; the town itself has a few hotel options. Peak period is the ski season (from December to April), at which time reservations are essential. Weekend bookings are a good idea year-round. Prices are slashed on weekdays. If you roll into town without a reservation, look inside the shelter in front of the train station; all the accommodation options are listed, and those with vacancies are lit up green, Austrian-style. Also check www.kalavryta-hotels.gr, which has some good options. The cheapest accommodation is in the domatia on the streets behind the train station.



Hotel Filoxenia

HOTEL €

(☎26920 22422; www.hotelfiloxenia.gr; Ethnikis Andistasis 10; d/tr incl breakfast €53/65;    Kind of like an old-fashioned ski lodge with its handsome stone exterior, Filoxenia has somewhat dowdy rooms with balconies (and jacuzzi tubs). Rates include either a sauna, *hammam* or hydromassage session per day.

Tsovolos Apartments

APARTMENT €

(☎26920 22292; Kosta Fassou 14; d/tr/apt incl breakfast €30/45/55;   Towards the west end of town, near the EKO petrol station, these warm, snug rooms and two-bedroom apartments are basic but offer good value. There are shared tea-making facilities but breakfast is unlikely to thrill you.

★ Archontiko Zafeiropoulou

APARTMENT €€

(☎26920 24500; www.archontiko.gr; Striftompala; d/ste incl breakfast €90/130;   These doubles and suites are essentially spacious, spotless studio apartments with kitchenettes. The real treasure here is the friendly South African-Greek owner, George, who has an outstanding knowledge of the town and surrounding

RIDING THE MOUNTAIN RAILS

One of the unmissable journeys to make in the Peloponnese is aboard the tiny train running along the vintage rack-and-pinion **Diakofto–Kalavryta Railway** (☎ 26910 43206; www.odontotos.com; one way/return €9.50/19) between Diakofto and Kalavryta. It takes travellers on a remarkably scenic ride through the dramatic Vouraikos Gorge, its reddish cliffs seemingly closing in on the train. The line switches back and forth under a leafy canopy of plane trees, clinging to a narrow ledge overhanging the rushing rapids below, and passing through seven curving tunnels along the way.

To reach Kalavryta, the train climbs over 700m in 22.5km, using a rack-and-pinion (cog) system for traction on the steep sections, effectively clamping itself to the notched girder you can see running between the rails. Built by an Italian company between 1889 and 1895, the railway was a remarkable feat of engineering for its time, with only a handful of equivalents around the world (most notably in the Swiss Alps). The trains running the route are shiny and modern, but the original steam engines that first plied the route can still be seen outside Diakofto and Kalavryta stations.

The journey takes just over an hour, and stops en route at the picturesque hamlet of Zahlorou and two other tiny stations on demand, in case you want to be dropped off at one and walk to another. The railway makes an even more scenic hike, as you have more time to appreciate your surroundings.

Hiking the 22km down from Kalavryta to Diakofto takes around five hours; train drivers are used to hikers along the tracks and give them plenty of warning. Take a torch (flashlight) for the tunnels.

At the time of writing there were three departures on weekdays and five on weekends in each direction; confirm times at the respective train stations.

Kalavryta is linked by regular buses to Athens and Patra. To get to Diakofto, catch the only 'working' train line, Corinth–Patra, with OSE replacement buses running in place of trains along the Diakofto–Kiato section at time of writing. On leaving Diakofto, you can catch the same replacement bus service west to Patra or, to head east, take the replacement bus service to Kiato, from where you catch the *proastiako* train, either to Corinth or as far as Athens airport.

attractions, and handy maps at hand. The excellent breakfast includes local sheep's milk yoghurt, honey, preserves and cheeses.

Hotel Kynaitha

HOTEL €€

(☎ 26920 22609; www.kynaitha.com; Ethnikis Andistasis 11; d/tr/ste incl breakfast €65/77/145; 📞) Modern and comfortable with spacious and attractively furnished rooms. Think exposed stone walls, gleaming white bathrooms and posh toiletries.



Eating & Drinking

There's an abundance of tavernas and cafes, mostly along 25 Martiou.

To Spitikou

TAVERNA €

(☎ 26920 24260; Vasileos Constantinou; mains €7-12; 🍽️ lunch & dinner; 📞) This cosy place with a ski-lodge feel serves up great-quality traditional taverna meals. Expect the likes of veal with tomato sauce, chicken baked with vegetables, spinach and feta soufflé and quite possibly the best tzatziki in the Peloponnese.

Gri Gri Café

SWEETS €

(25 Martiou; snacks €1.70-4; ☎ 8am-8pm) This good family-run spot is recommended for its sweet or savoury homemade snacks, such as cheese pie, baklava and tasty *crème* (sweet, set custard).

i Information

The train station is on the northern edge of town, opposite the Holocaust Museum. To the right of the museum is Syngrou/25 Martiou, a pedestrian precinct. To the left of the museum is Konstantinou.

The central square, Plateia Kalavrytou, is two blocks up from the train station.

The ticket office at the train station doubles as a tourist office.

National Bank of Greece (25 Martiou) Just before Plateia Kalavrytou.

Post office (☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) Behind Plateia Kalavrytou.

i Getting There & Around

The rack-and-pinion train to/from Diakofto via Zahlorou runs to a changing timetable.

There are buses to Patra (€8, two hours, five daily on weekdays, two on weekends) and Athens (€17, three hours, two Monday to Saturday, one Sunday). The **bus station** (☎26920 22224) is 200m before the entrance to town (from the Diakofto approach road), beside the Jetoil petrol station.

Kalavryta's **taxi rank** (☎26920 22127) is in front of the train station.

Most of the attractions are out of town, so it's very handy to have your own transport.

Around Kalavryta

Kalavryta and its surrounding mountains feature several varied and interesting sites. While some are just outside the town, others are further afield but doable in a car.

👁 Sights & Activities

Cave of the Lakes

CAVE

(☎26920 31001; www.kastriacave.gr; adult/concession €9/4.50; ☀9.30am-4.30pm, longer hours in summer) The remarkable Cave of the Lakes lies 16.5km south of Kalavryta near the village of Kastria. A 500m boardwalk snakes its way through the cave, through the vast entrance chamber, home to five species of bats, past spectacular cauliflower-like rock formations, and over the deep, crystal-clear subterranean pools – the 13 stone basins formed by mineral deposits over the millennia. The most impressive formations are in the final chamber, where delicate, ribboning curtains cascade down the wall.

The cave features in Greek mythology and is mentioned in the writings of the ancient traveller Pausanias, but its whereabouts remained unknown in modern times until 1964 when locals investigated, having noticed water pouring from the roof of a smaller cave. They discovered a large bat-filled cavern at the start of a 2km-long cave carved out by a subterranean river.

Access is by guided half-hour tour (in Greek) only. Foreign visitors are provided with a booklet in English; the sight at each designated stop along the boardwalk corresponds to the letter in the booklet.

A taxi from Kalavryta costs around €40 return (the taxi will wait for you). There's a good taverna right next to the cave entrance.

Moni Mega Spileo

MONASTERY

(Monastery of the Great Cavern; ☎26920 23130; ☀8am-1pm & 2pm-sunset summer) **FREE** Moni Mega Spileo is a 3km walk up from Zahlorou. The original monastery was destroyed in 1943 when Nazis executed all the monks. The new monastery's most prized relic is the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary, said to have been painted by St Luke. It was supposedly discovered in the nearby cavern by St Theodore and St Simeon in AD 362, but most likely dates back to around AD 1000. Popular with pilgrims; strict dress code applies.

Call ahead outside of summer.

Moni Agias Lavras

MONASTERY

(☎26920 22363; ☀10am-1pm & 4-5pm) **FREE** The original 10th-century monastery that stood here was burnt down by the Nazis, and its monks killed. The chapel of the new monastery is where Greece's War of Independence was allegedly launched; the banner standard from the war is displayed alongside monastic memorabilia. The monastery is around 5km southwest of Kalavryta. A taxi from Kalavryta costs around €20 return.

Ski Centre

SKIING

(☎26920 24451; www.kalavrita-ski.gr; half-/full day €18/25; ☀9am-4pm Dec-Apr) Head 14km east of Kalavryta on Mt Helmos (2355m) to the Ski Centre (elevation 1700m to 2340m), which has 12 runs and seven lifts (two chairlifts). There's no overnight accommodation but it rents skis and snowboard equipment (€20 for boots and skis or a snowboard). The season lasts from December to April, snow permitting. A taxi costs about €40 return.

Tetramythos Winery

WINERY

(☎26910 97500; www.tetramythoswines.com; ☀9am-4pm) Located in Ano Diakofto village (not to be confused with Diakofto), 5km along the road from Diakofto to Kalavryta, this winery is run by two local brothers who take a lot of pride in their *agiorgitiko*, cabernet sauvignon, *tetramythos*, *mala-gousia* and other vintages. Tours and free wine-tasting sessions are very worthwhile.

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