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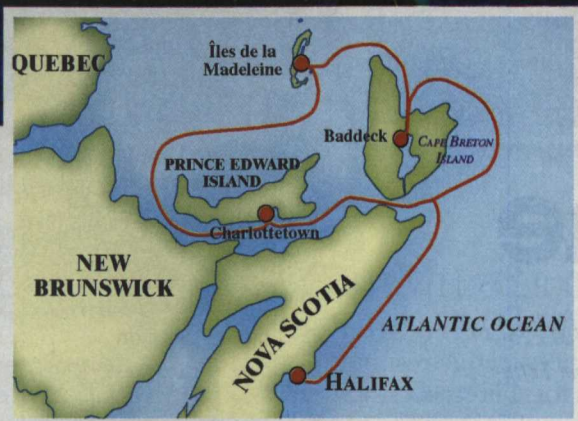


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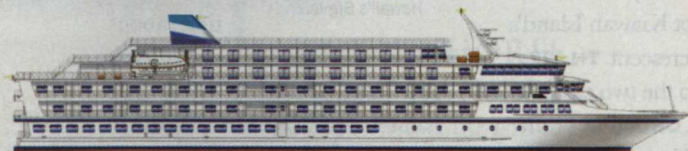
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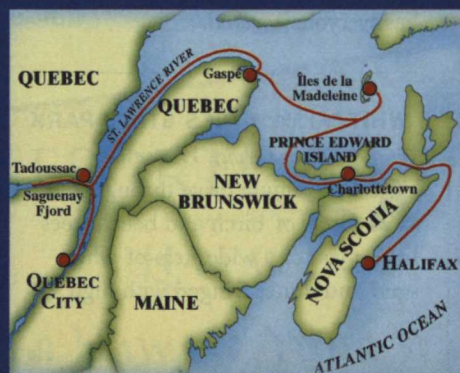
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Saint Nicholas monastery on the Greek island of Spetses.  
Photographed by Tim Walker

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If you're looking for a place that's teeming with authenticity (not multitudes), follow **Eleni N. Gage** to these three undiscovered islands along the Peloponnese—each with its own distinct personality, all still blissfully under the radar  
**Photographed by Tim Walker**

# (Secret) Islands of Greece

[GUIDE & MAP > PAGE 102]

A view of the Byzantine-era village on Monemvasia island, off the southeastern coast of the Peloponnese peninsula.





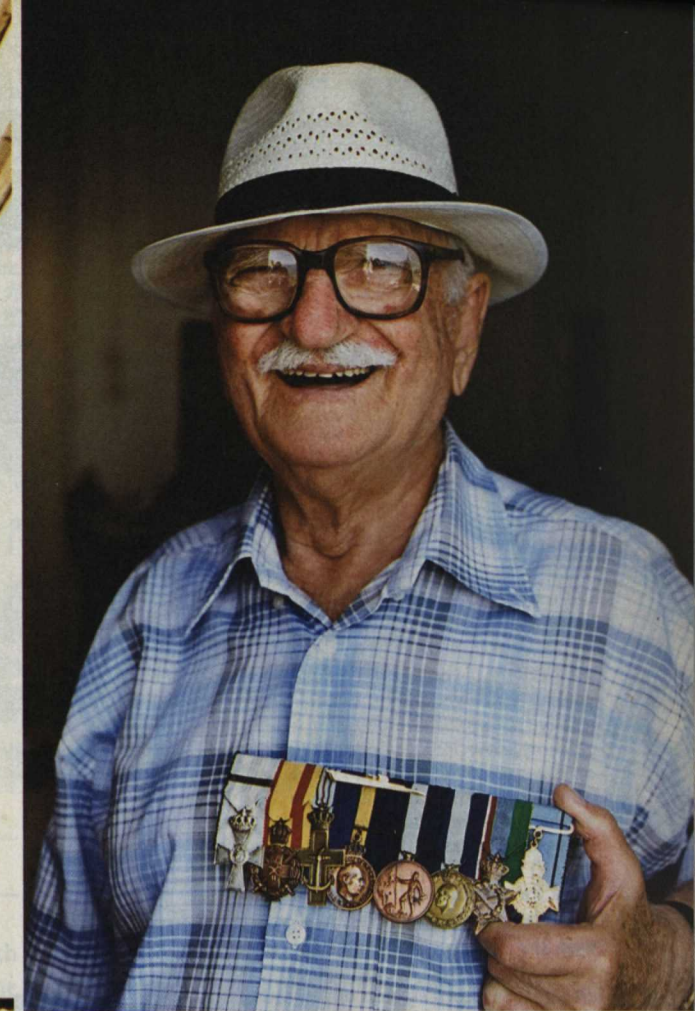


A traditional *choklakia* (pebble-mosaic) courtyard in front of the Saint Nicholas monastery, in Spetses town, overlooking the Gulf of Argolis. Left: A local's wooden boat outside a house on Spetses. Right, from top: Demetrios Papadimitriou, a decorated Spetsiot sea captain; charcoal-grilled octopus at the taverna on the beach at Agia Paraskeví.

## When I was seven, my family moved from Greece to the United States. I've been living in limbo ever since,

shuttling back and forth, accruing frequent-flier miles and a growing sense of disorientation. What starts as an idyllic summer vacation often morphs into a mild identity crisis. If I'm both Greek and American, where am I really at home?

So in planning my annual trip to Greece last summer, I chose destinations that wouldn't make me feel like a visitor. After three decades of traveling in the country, I'd already done countless sunsets on Santorini, moonlit concerts under the Acropolis, and midnight dinners on Mykonos. I wanted to go where locals spend their vacations, the Greek equivalent of Stonington, Maine, not Miami Beach. On this trip, I aimed to re-create the simple, sunlit joy of summers past, when home was wherever you spread your beach towel. I finally narrowed it down to three islands I'd visited years ago on trips that left me with fond memories and clear, sharply lit snapshots. Then I canvassed Greek friends who confirmed that the places have remained virtually unknown to most Americans but beloved by Greeks. The risk of revisiting somewhere you've loved is that it will betray you by having grown older and more jaded, as you have. But the islands I re-discovered made me forget the past and embrace the present—meeting friends on Spetses, walking into a time warp on Monemvasía, and exploring caves and coves on Kíthira. These islands couldn't be more different from each other, but each is quintessentially Greek, full of unpretentious food and locals offering the kind of welcome you only find when you've really gotten away.





## SAILING THE PELOPONNESIAN COAST

Spetses, Monemvasia, and Kithira are all located off the coast of the Peloponnese, a large, hand-shaped peninsula in southern Greece (see page 102 for map). The area is a microcosm of the country's most appealing attractions: iconic ruins, traditional villages, sandy beaches, and picturesque islands offshore. The most scenic way to take it all in is by boat.

**HOW TO DO IT** Recommended yacht-charter companies include Valef Yachts ([valefyachts.com](http://valefyachts.com)), Olympic Yacht Charters ([olympicyachtcharters.com](http://olympicyachtcharters.com)), and Afroudakis ([afroudakisusa.com](http://afroudakisusa.com)).

**THE COST** If you're chartering your own crewed yacht, expect to pay from \$2,000 a day (not including provisions), depending on the size of the boat and crew. Some companies, such as Alpha Yachting ([alphayachting.com](http://alphayachting.com)), also offer set itineraries, which cost \$1,000 to \$3,000 per person per week for a double-occupancy cabin.

**RECOMMENDED STOPS** Along with the islands of Spetses, Monemvasia, and Kithira, a sailing trip along the eastern stretch of the coast, the region's "thumb," could include some of the following destinations:

**Epidavros** One of Greece's prettiest and most peaceful ruins is centered around a fourth-century-B.C. amphitheater.

**Hydra** A tiny, car-free artists' haven where donkeys cart luggage down winding lanes lined with chic boutiques and simple tavernas.

**Nafplion** A former capital of modern Greece, this lovely town is crowned by an 18th-century Venetian fortress, with cobbled streets full of art shops, elegant seafront restaurants (Agnanti is a favorite), and bar-lounges built on platforms that hover over the coast.

**Elafonissos** The small island has one sleepy village—and several world-renowned white-sand beaches. —E.N.G.

One of 11 rustic guest rooms at Kellia, a former monastery in Monemvasia's Kastro, or Old Town. Opposite: The breakfast patio of the restored 16th-century hotel, set on a seaside bluff.



## SPETSES

**I**FIRST VISITED SPETSES, a small island with 18 miles of coast and a hilly interior of pine forests, as a teenager, while staying in my aunt's cottage in Portoheli, on the mainland. From my aunt's house, I'd hike down a dirt path to the port, then take a water taxi across the Gulf of Argolis over to Spetses town, a waterfront stretch of well-kept ship captains' mansions with pebble mosaics in their inner courtyards and massive anchors out front. Spetses seemed gloriously cosmopolitan to me then: British, Italian, and French visitors mixed with the wealthy Athenians who moored their yachts in the harbor.

It's not so different today. Less than two hours by hydrofoil from Athens, Spetses is still a favorite getaway for city dwellers seeking an escape from their manic megalopolis. "There are no cars on the island in summer, except a few belonging to local businesses," said the woman who welcomed me to the Nissia hotel, a complex of pastel cottages built on the grounds of an old textile factory, as she led me around a pool populated by nannies giving swimming lessons. "You can flag down a horse-drawn carriage on the harbor, walk, rent a bike or motorcycle, or have us call a cab. But be prepared to wait," she warned. "There are only four cabs in total."

The four cabs serve a population of 4,100 year-round inhabitants, all living in or around Spetses town. In 1821, when the Greek War of Independence began, Spetses had 13,000 inhabitants. Now, there are only enough locals to support one high school, but in summer and on holidays, the island's population swells to nearly its 19th-century level. During the time I spent on Spetses, I grew accustomed to the island's rhythm, swaying between the traditional life and the swanky summer scene. One night I ate a simple meal of tomato fritters and calamari at Rousos Taverna while a gypsy lady circulated, hawking embroidered tablecloths. When she stopped to take a bathroom break, my mustached waiter watched over her bundle of fabric, leaning against a wall under a string of octopi with his captain's hat pushed low on his forehead. The next evening, I joined friends who had piloted a speedboat over from the mainland to eat at their favorite restaurant, La Scala. We sat at a candlelit table on a rooftop overlooking the sea, and soon the blond owner, Fenella Catsoris, recognized my friends as regulars. She hurried over and exclaimed, in an accent and scene out of *Absolutely Fabulous*, "We've got fresh truffles! I went to Athens today on the catamaran and picked them up." Originally from England, Catsoris married a Greek and had been living on Spetses for 22 years. Now she is enriching the island's gourmet offerings, one truffle at a time.

I grew accustomed to the island's rhythm, swaying

between the traditional life and the swanky scene

**T+L WEB EXTRA** For 7-day, 14-day, and 21-day sailing itineraries along this coast, go to [travelandleisure.com](http://travelandleisure.com).





A hilltop terrace at Hotel Margarita, a 19th-century mansion in Hora, the main town on Kithira. Left: One of Kithira's many ruins. Right, from top: Surveying the island's Kaladi Beach; Hora's signature whitewashed buildings.

## The locals and summer residents conspire to keep KÍTHIRA a secret

I spent my mornings in town, browsing art stores and dodging yachties photographing each other with their cell phones, and my afternoons playing *Gilligan's Island*, sailing a rented motorboat from one secluded, crescent-shaped cove to the next. One afternoon, I swam in solitude until a yacht sailed up and I decided to grant its topless inhabitants some privacy. So I motored on to the sandy beach of Agia (Saint) Paraskeví, eight miles southwest of the harbor, where pine trees scented the air and provided a dark-green backdrop for the cobalt sea and a whitewashed chapel. After a lunch of fried zucchini and perfectly spiced mini-burgers at the beach's nameless taverna, I reclined on a sun-bed, eavesdropping on a seven-year-old boy who spoke Greek with his parents, French with his nanny, and Arabic with his sister (they live in Dubai during the rest of the year, he told me).

Spetses' most famous inhabitant had a far less relaxing relationship with the sea. In the harbor in Spetses town, a grand statue of Bouboulina claims pride of place. The female sea captain led the Spetsiot fleet to victory in the 1821 War of Independence and she remains an important symbol of the island's erstwhile political power. A few yards on, I encountered a more modern Spetsiot legend when I passed a seafront house, battered but still handsome, like its owner, who was sitting on his balcony, barefoot and bare-chested, while his wife shelled beans in the cool of the living room. Demetrios Papadimitriou was a captain, like Bouboulina—except he spent 16 years commanding submarines, not leading revolutionaries. He

invited me in and showed me his medals, a photo of the Y-5 Triton submarine he'd been on when it sank in 1942, and a painting of his grandfather's boat from 1891. "We've always been captains, but not anymore," he said. "Now my son owns the Fanari grill, in the square." He smiled. "But he has photos of our boats on the walls."

That evening, I met a real descendant of Bouboulina's, Christos Orloff, who added four faithful reproductions of his family home to the 1865 original to create the Orloff Resort. Tucked away in a quiet neighborhood just above the Old Harbor, the 22-room boutique hotel is built around a courtyard pool surrounded by ancient olive trees. I drank a glass of Chablis and studied the scene, unable to tell whether this particular olive tree or that clay urn was an ancient or modern addition. That was the point, Orloff told me: to bring a modern sensibility to old Spetses. Admiring the local architecture while drinking imported wine, I had to agree that he had struck the right balance.

At the nearby Tarsanas restaurant, the *fagri* (white snapper) being served had been caught that day, and I ordered some while watching boatbuilders work at a trade as old as the island, sanding hulls at the boatyards at the end of the Old Harbor. Spetsiots have found so many uses for ships—from fighting for independence to picking up a few truffles; from submarine warfare to searching for the perfect spot to swim. Over the years, they've also honed their ability to navigate between modern and traditional pleasures, making the island the kind of place where sandy







Kaladi, a remote pebble beach dotted with caves, on the eastern side of Kithira. Opposite: A popular swimming spot in Avlémonas village, on Kithira.



## GUIDE TO SECRET GREEK ISLANDS



### GETTING THERE

If you're not sailing around the Peloponnese, the most direct routes to these three islands is through Athens. Spetses is two hours away by hydrofoil ([hellenicseaways.gr](http://hellenicseaways.gr)); Monemvasia is three hours by car; and Kithira is 45 minutes by plane ([olympicairlines.com](http://olympicairlines.com)). Find more information on the Greek National Tourism Organization's Web site ([greektourism.com](http://greektourism.com)).

### GETTING AROUND

Cars are forbidden on Spetses and Monemvasia; expect to do

most of your exploring on foot. On Spetses, you can rent a bicycle from a local vendor, while hilly Monemvasia is more suited for walking. On Kithira, the biggest island, you'll want wheels. Try Panayotis Rent-a-Car (Kapsali; 30-273/603-1600; from \$28 per day). Many restaurants have no address, but the isles are small enough that residents can easily direct you.

### WHERE TO STAY

**SPETSES**  
**Nissia Traditional Residences** Kounoupitsa; 30-229/807-5000; [nissia.gr](http://nissia.gr); doubles from \$330, including breakfast.

**Orloff Resort** Old Harbor; 30-229/807-5444; [orloffresort.com](http://orloffresort.com); doubles from \$245, including breakfast.

### MONEMVASIA

**Ardamis Traditional Guest Rooms** Kastro; 30-273/206-1886; [ardamis.gr](http://ardamis.gr); doubles from \$185.

**Kellia** Converted 16th-century monastery. Kastro; 30-273/206-1520; [kellia.gr](http://kellia.gr); doubles from \$100, including breakfast.

### KITHIRA

**Hotel Margarita** Hora; 30-273/603-1711; [hotel-margarita.com](http://hotel-margarita.com); doubles from \$120, including breakfast.

**Pitsinades** Charming six-room hotel. Aroniádika; 30-273/603-3877; [pitsinades.com](http://pitsinades.com); doubles from \$120, including breakfast.

### WHERE TO EAT

**SPETSES**  
**La Scala** Old Harbor; 30-229/807-4963; dinner for two \$75.

**Roussos Taverna** Ayios Mamas; 30-229/807-2212; dinner for two \$50.

**Tarsanas** Old Harbor; 30-229/807-4490; dinner for two \$80.

### MONEMVASIA

**Marianthi Restaurant** Kastro; 30-273/206-1371; dinner for two \$40.

**Matoula's** Kastro; 30-273/206-1660; dinner for two \$50.

**To Kanoni** Kastro; 30-273/206-1387; dinner for two \$50.

### KITHIRA

**Belvedere Pizzeria** Hora; 30-273/603-1892; dinner for two \$40.

**To Korali Restaurant** Avlémonas; 30-273/603-4173; dinner for two \$40.

**Zorba's** Hora; 30-273/603-1655; dinner for two \$40.

### WHAT TO DO

**Spetses Yachting Club** Twelve motorboats for daylong rentals. Dappia; 30-229/807-3400; from \$65.



**T+L ONLINE**  
FOR GUIDES TO SIX OTHER GREEK ISLANDS—INCLUDING MYKONOS, PAROS, AND PAXOS—GO TO [TRAVELANDLEISURE.COM](http://TRAVELANDLEISURE.COM).

beaches and truffled pasta go hand in hand and you can leave your cars and cares behind.

## MONEMVASIA

**M**ONEMVASIA MEANS “single entrance,” and indeed the only way into Monemvasia town, or the craggy, Gibraltar-like little isle on which it rests, is through a stone archway at the foot of a fortress. Its massive wood-and-iron doors are permanently pushed aside, rotting picturesquely as muscular boys wheel carts of produce, water bottles, and fresh laundry along the cobblestones. Tourists enterprising enough to find and pass through the arch discover a maze of stone cottages straggling down the cliffside to the dark sea below.

Monemvasia island is tiny—a little over a mile long and just 328 yards high—but it is a minor marvel. After splitting from the mainland during an

earthquake in A.D. 375, the protected citadel of Monemvasia eventually became the island that time forgot. Its allure is not sun, sea, and nightlife but rather the ability to live, however briefly, in another age. Its architecture has remained virtually unchanged since the days of the Byzantine Empire, when it was a significant trading point, famous for the no-longer-produced wine known as Malmsey in England and Malvasia in Italy and Greece. (Sadly, the grape has died out on Monemvasia, though it is still cultivated on other Greek islands.) There is not one modern building on the island, and virtually no year-round residents; the handful of “locals” who run the inns do so for up to 10 months a year, catering to visitors.

At my inn, Ardamis, an ancient well has been converted into a coffee table in one room; in another, a stone storage pantry is now a steam room; and my suite, No. 16, looks out on a ruined Turkish bath. Over coffee on a mosaic terrace with an expansive view of the sea, the hotel's owner, Vas-

silis Ardamis, told me about his predecessors in the 800-year-old house: “The Venetian governor lived here; under the Turks, this is where the courts were—a judge named Ibrahim lived in the house then—and two Byzantine emperors made it their home, in the rooms I share with my wife.” Ten members of the government's Ministry of Archaeology oversee the architectural integrity of the village, ensuring that buildings like Ardamis stick around for another 800 years. Life in a historic setting isn't always easy—Monemvasia is the opposite of handicapped-accessible, and to find e-mail access or an ATM you have to leave the fortress and take the bus across a causeway to the modern town of Monemvasia on the mainland. (Yes, it's confusing: not only is the ancient town named for the island but the new settlement across the water is as well. To differentiate, locals often call Monemvasia's Old Town the Kastro, or “Fortress.”) Despite my severe e-mail addiction, for three days I never saw a need to leave the Kastro. (Continued on page 142)



(Continued from page 103) Every morning I'd climb up to the island's summit to visit a church known both as the Agia Sophia and the Panagia Odegetria. (As Monemvasia ping-ponged between Turkish, Frankish, and Venetian dominion until 1821, it flipped between being a mosque and an Orthodox or a Catholic church.) My short hike up stone stairs delivered a huge payoff—limitless views of the town's cupolas, rooftops, and pointed chimneys, down to the rough sea. After descending, I'd swim at the Portello, the Kastro's only bathing spot. Reached through another arch in the town walls, the Portello is a string of barnacled rocks, submerged during high tide, with metal stairs leading into the sea. It's no sandy beach, but I loved being buffeted by the waves and then reclining on a rock, letting the tide rush over me.

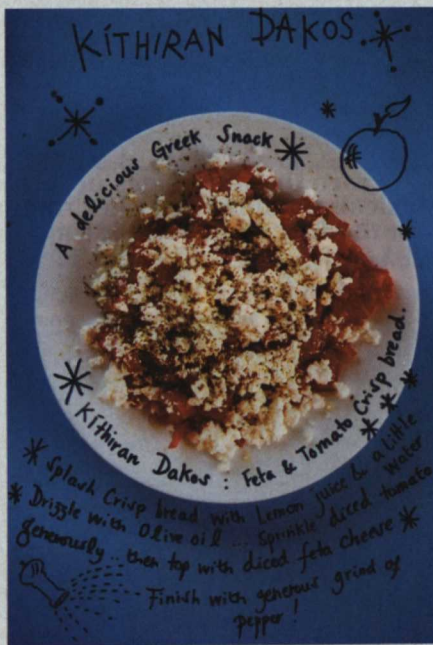
There are more restaurants on my Manhattan block than on the entire island, but after working up an appetite swimming (it is a remarkably choppy sea), I was able to discern differences among each of the three tavernas that make up Monemvasia's culinary trifecta. To Kanoni had the most interesting local dishes, such as *saiti*, a crêpeline spinach pie. Across the street, Marianthi lacked a view but had great specials, including thin green peppers stuffed with cheese. And I ate two dinners at Matoula's, which had the largest terrace, so I could watch well-fed cats leap across roof tiles below me in the twilight while I ate spicy *soutzoukakia* (meatballs).

It didn't take long for me to feel like a native. So I was barely surprised when, as I walked down the street one morning, someone called my name. It was the maître d' from my favorite hotel in Athens, the Grande Bretagne. "I grew up here!" he bragged. "Well, in a village on the mainland. We would come here for church, for festivals." A good friend of Ardamis, he was building his own small luxury hotel on Monemvasia. "It should be finished by 2008," he said, "God and the archaeologists willing."

## KITHIRA

I'D BEEN TO KITHIRA TWICE before, but I'd only stayed for two days each time. Even that was enough for me to realize that I loved the pleasant incongruity of this Ionian is-

land. It has the blindingly white houses, broad beaches, and bright bougainvillea of the Cyclades, but instead of being barren and volcanic, it's lush and green, like the other Ionians. Best of all, it's never overrun with tourists. This is partly because it's in the middle of nowhere—floating at the intersection of the Ionian and Cretan seas—and partly because it's sizable, with 30 miles of coastline, and mountains filled with wildflowers and Byzantine villages. But mostly, it's because the locals (3,400 people live there year-round), returning immigrants, and summer residents conspire to keep Kithira a secret. In the Athens airport,



Kithiran Dakos, a mix of feta, tomatoes, and dried bread, at To Korali Restaurant, in Kithira, annotated by our photographer, Tim Walker.

I bumped into the owner of Milos, a restaurant with locations in New York, Montreal, and Athens, and told him my itinerary. "I have a house on Kithira," he said, frowning. "Be careful what you write. For those of us who spend time there, it's someplace very special."

Technically, Kithira is the seventh of the Ionians, but it is geographically far removed from the rest, off the bottom of the Peloponnese, halfway to Crete, which is as close to Libya as it is to mainland Greece. I reached the island via the hour-long car ferry from Neapolis, but in my flurry of last-minute planning, I'd forgotten one thing: the car. Now there were none to be had on the island—even on quiet Kithira, the handful of rental outfits

book up fast in high season—and I was trapped in Hora, the hilltop capital.

Of course, most people who get "trapped" in Hora do so by choice. François Crépeaux and Frédéric Ferrière, owners of the Hotel Margarita, still make their home in Paris in the winters, but after vacationing on Kithira six years ago decided to live there eight months a year, running the hotel, a 12-room converted mansion. "We fell in love with the island," Crépeaux told me, as we sat on their hilltop breakfast patio. "So we just stayed." Now they spend afternoons hopping on their scooters and zooming off to a quiet cove outside of Hora, which they reach by holding onto a rope and pulling themselves down a path through trees to the beach. Just the kind of place I'd go. If I had a car. Instead, I wandered around town, stopping for iced coffee in cafés overlooking pastures that rolled down to the sea. It was delightful, until I got hungry.

One of my few cardinal rules is never to eat at a restaurant named Zorba's—a certain tourist trap. But the only two restaurants I noticed in Hora were Zorba's and the Belvedere Pizzeria. Despite the latter's fabulous views of the illuminated Venetian-era castle, I didn't feel like pizza. So I found myself climbing upstairs to the roof of Zorba's. I almost fled when I saw Anthony Quinn dancing on the menu, above the quote, "It was from Zorba that I learned to stop fearing life and live." But I stayed, and had the cheapest, most satisfying dinner of my entire trip—perfectly grilled souvlaki, a salad filled with juicy, thick tomatoes, and a light rosé. It was all accompanied by entertainment, as the owner, who, like Zorba, dispenses advice, scolded a guest that fried cheese was "strictly forbidden in this heat!"

After dinner I wandered into the square and found the cafés filled with blue-haired gal pals yelling at their rambunctious grandchildren, and bald guys flicking worry beads. It reminded me of when I was a rowdy toddler, running around after dinner with kids I'd just met while my parents, unconcerned, drank wine out of tin carafes and watched my baby sister sleeping on two taverna chairs they'd pushed together to make a crib.

I was still determined to get out of town and explore some of the island's best-known sights. So bright and early the next morning, I stood in front of a »

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(Continued from page 103) Every morning I'd climb up to the island's summit to visit a church known both as the Agia Sophia and the Panagia Odegetria. (As Monemvasia ping-ponged between Turkish, Frankish, and Venetian domination until 1821, it flipped between being a mosque and an Orthodox or a Catholic church.) My short hike up stone stairs delivered a huge payoff—limitless views of the town's cupolas, rooftops, and pointed chimneys, down to the rough sea. After descending, I'd swim at the Portello, the Kastro's only bathing spot. Reached through another arch in the town walls, the Portello is a string of barnacled rocks, submerged during high tide, with metal stairs leading into the sea. It's no sandy beach, but I loved being buffeted by the waves and then reclining on a rock, letting the tide rush over me.

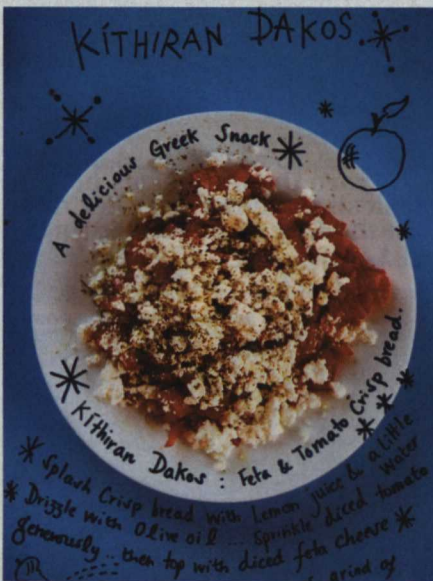
There are more restaurants on my Manhattan block than on the entire island, but after working up an appetite swimming (it is a *remarkably* choppy sea), I was able to discern differences among each of the three tavernas that make up Monemvasia's culinary trifecta. To Kanoni had the most interesting local dishes, such as *saiti*, a crêpelike spinach pie. Across the street, Marianthi lacked a view but had great specials, including thin green peppers stuffed with cheese. And I ate two dinners at Matoula's, which had the largest terrace, so I could watch well-fed cats leap across roof tiles while I ate spicy *souvlaki*.

It didn't take long to become a local native. So I was back as I walked down the street, someone called my name. I'd been called from my favorite spot, the Grande Bretagne, he bragged. "Welcome to the mainland. We were waiting for you, for festival." Ardamis, he was back at the luxury hotel on Monemvasia, to be finished by 2001, the archaeologists.

KITHIRAN

I'D BEEN TO KITHIRA before, but I'd never been each time enough for me to remember the pleasant incongruity

land. It has the blindingly white houses, broad beaches, and bright bougainvillea of the Cyclades, but instead of being barren and volcanic, it's lush and green, like the other Ionians. Best of all, it's never overrun with tourists. This is partly because it's in the middle of nowhere—floating at the intersection of the Ionian and Cretan seas—and partly because it's sizable, with 30 miles of coastline, and mountains filled with wildflowers and Byzantine villages. But mostly, it's because the locals (3,400 people live there year-round), returning immigrants, and summer residents conspire to keep Kithira a secret. In the Athens airport,



book up fast in high season—and I was trapped in Hora, the hilltop capital.

Of course, most people who get "trapped" in Hora do so by choice. François Crépeaux and Frédéric Ferrière, owners of the Hotel Margarita, still make their home in Paris in the winters, but after vacationing on Kithira six years ago decided to live there eight months a year, running the hotel, a 12-room converted mansion. "We fell in love with the island," Crépeaux told me, as we sat on their hilltop breakfast patio. "So we just stayed." Now they spend afternoons hopping on their scooters and zooming off to a quiet cove outside of Hora, which they reach by holding onto a rope and pulling themselves down a path through trees to the beach. Just the kind of place I'd go. If I had a car. Instead, I wandered around town, stopping for iced coffee in cafés overlooking pastures that rolled down to the sea. It was delightful, until I got hungry.

One of my few cardinal rules is never to eat at a restaurant named Zorba's—a certain tourist trap. But the only two restaurants I noticed in Hora were Zorba's and the Belvedere Pizzeria. Despite the latter's fabulous views of the illuminated Venetian-era castle, I didn't feel like pizza. So I found myself climbing upstairs to the roof of Zorba's. I almost fled when I saw Anthony Quinn dancing on the menu, above the quote, "It was from Zorba that I learned to stop fearing life and live." But

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parked cab until its owner came out of a café and handed me a business card printed YIORGOS D. KALOGEROS, DRIVER. I told him I wanted to visit the cave of Agia Sophia, which I'd seen on a postcard during my first visit to Kithira. At the foot of a path off Kithira's ring road, the cave was used as a church by sailors, who, in 1875, painted icons on the inside. Yiorgos D. Kalogeros, driver, sat in the shade, waiting as I followed a guide through a maze of stalagmites and stalactites. Afterward, we drove to his wife's hometown, the nearby, picture-perfect village of Mylopotamos. Beneath the town square hides another landmark, the Neraides waterfall, a rushing torrent that ends in an ankle-deep pool shaded by trees that look as if their only purpose were to offer a little privacy to bathing wood-nymphs. Kalogeros seemed to know everyone on the island, from the speleologist giving tours at Agia Sophia to the backgammon players in Mylopotamos's square, who greeted him with a joy I would have imagined they'd reserve for relatives who had left long ago and only just returned for the summer. All I'd wanted was a ride, and instead I'd ended up on a tour with the island's unofficial mayor.

On my last day, I decided to try my luck with the local bus, which crosses the island on limited routes. One led to the crescent-shaped beach of Kapsali, which is ringed by tavernas and dotted with blue-and-white changing booths that add a dash of retro-chic to the shore. Lolling about in the sparkling surf, I tried to channel a fittingly retro-chic icon, Brigitte Bardot. Then I remembered I hadn't brought a cinematic sundress to change into. Improvising, I threw a shirt over my suit and ran to catch the bus. As it chugged up the hillside, I spotted a small turquoise bay hidden between two steep green cliffs; for a moment, until we turned the corner, I had the best view on the island. Sitting in a damp bathing suit on an old velour bus seat next to a grandma in a housecoat, I'd finally accomplished my goal of recapturing my past. I was damp, salty, exhausted, and exhilarated. It was the feeling of my childhood summers. +

*Eleni N. Gage is the author of North of Ithaka: A Journey Home Through a Family's Extraordinary Past (St. Martin's Press).*

(Continued from page 124) museum projects under the jurisdiction of a newly created Qatar Museum Authority, headed by his daughter Sheikhha al-Mayassa bint Hamad al-Thani and aided by foreign advisers, including former British National Gallery chairman Jacob Rothschild and a top executive of the Geneva-based Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

"Museums are going to be pivotal to Qatar's future," says Sheikhha al-Mayassa, a 23-year-old Duke University graduate, as we talk in her office. "Education and culture give people a chance for a better life and a better life for their children. A lot of countries in the Arab world are very rich yet have a poor population. There's a lack of innovation. There's stagnation. Qatar is trying to become a role model. It has proven it can make a lot of changes in a short time."

**From the Museum of Islamic Art, I walk**

along the waterfront to see the construction site of Japanese architect Arata Isozaki's futuristic new National Library, an inverted pyramid poised atop three mammoth pillars. For a nearby plot, Santiago Calatrava has drawn up a Museum of Photography with two immense intersecting wings that open and close, depending on the light conditions. At the opposite end of the bay, Jean Nouvel has been asked to revamp the National Museum, a heretofore modest affair housed in a former royal palace. And Scotland's Kathryn Findlay has designed an elegant new Museum of Traditional Costumes and Textiles.

There's more: Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed al-Thani, Sheikh Saud's older brother and cousin of Sheikhha al-Mayassa, has assembled his own collections, which are already open to the public by appointment. These collections—the Arab Museum for Modern Art and the Qatari National Heritage Library—are currently kept in provisional structures south of Doha's city center, waiting to move to new homes.

Sheikh Hassan is abroad during my visit, but one of his advisers, Yousuf Ahmad al-Homaid, offers to meet me outside one of the city's newest malls, the Landmark, where women in black burkas shop for foreign brands ranging from Prada to Häagen-Dazs.

Wearing a long white robe and a black-corded cotton headdress, Al-

Homaid picks me up in a cream-colored SUV, and after a short drive we reach an unassuming four-story stuccoed villa. Its interior is a startling contrast to the hot and dusty streetscape outside. Here, in spacious galleries and climate-controlled storerooms, are more than 10,000 20th-century paintings, drawings, and sculptures from throughout the Arab world.

"The West thinks that this area is desert and camels," Al-Homaid says. "We want people to discover what's really going on." In much the same way that Pei's museum will present an overview of Islamic art over the centuries, the Arab Museum for Modern Art will show the largest survey of modern Arab works anywhere. Sheikh Hassan has recently handed over the collection to the Qatari government, and an architectural competition is to be held shortly to come up with designs for two permanent buildings in which to display it.

As we walk from room to room, I see works created by artists from Morocco, Palestine, and the Gulf states. Many are of high quality; others are pale imitations of 20th-century trends in the West—Surrealism, Pop Art, colorful abstraction. Surprisingly, a number of nudes are on view, several quite erotic, and I ask how these will fare when they are displayed prominently in Islamic Qatar. "We've become more open now, man," Al-Homaid says in American-accented English, a vestige of his days studying art in California in the 1960's.

Along with the 20th-century Arab works, Sheikh Hassan has also assembled what may be the world's most important collection of Orientalist paintings—19th-century works by Westerners depicting what they found on expeditions to the Arab world. There is a certain irony in these images being reunited in Qatar, the very heart of the region they depict, loaded as they are with colonialist ideology. But if these stylized images of harems, mosques, oases, and camels are rejected by some as demeaning stereotypes, they nonetheless provide the rapidly changing region with a rare degree of documentation of bygone architectural styles and dress. The sheikh has also collected works by early photographers whose cameras chronicled the premodernized Middle East. All in all, the presentation of these works comes off as a reclamation of history, a »