

Condé Nast Traveler

ISLAND TIME
WHEN-TO-GO GUIDE

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

JULY 2005

101

SPECIAL
ISSUE

ISLANDS WE LOVE!

MED LEGENDS

CRETE
SANTORINI
MYKONOS
CORFU
SKIATHOS...

CARIBBEAN CLASSICS

ANTIGUA
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ST. BARTS
ST. LUCIA...

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CLASSICS Continued

Among the dazzling islands that launched a thousand myths, we love . . .

ALONISSOS's *Idyll*

#69 The Chora, a quiet, uneventful little village that first got electricity in 1988, is ideal for those craving tranquility. The harbor below is easily reached by bus or taxi, and the coast is patrolled by regular excursion boats. **Alonissos.gr** covers the basics, including the island's many agreeable hotels.

CEPHALONIA's *Light Show*

#70 Cephalonia had its moment of glory as the setting for the film *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. One of the movie's locations was Myrtos Beach, whose waters emit an astonishing, unearthly glow when sunlight reflects off the white-pebble seabed—a sight so spectacular that the filmmakers were accused of faking it. The rambling **Sami Beach Hotel** earns mention by virtue of the enormous charm of its owners, Greek-Americans from Chicago (30-26740-22824; samibeachhotel.gr; doubles, \$104-\$123).

CORFU's *Piece of Venice*

#71 Sadly, much of this once-beautiful island has suffered the onward march of concrete; at least its splendid old Venetian town endures. At its center is a huge esplanade where the Liston, a

ponderous row of arcaded buildings, still attracts well-to-do islanders to its elegant coffeehouses. Just uphill is the beloved **Cavaliere** (30-26610-39041; cavaliere-hotel.com; doubles, \$155-\$194), as well as the **Rex**, the place for island specialties (66 Capodistriou; 30-26610-39649; entrées, \$9-\$16).

FOLEGANDROS's *Gamely Cubism*

#72 Folegandros is home to the Greek Islands' prettiest white-cube village, Chora, which is perched dramatically on the edge of a 650-foot cliff. Many houses have been rebuilt, and the restored Venetian fortifications embrace charming squares. The "blue line" (sea-view) rooms at **Anemomilos Apartments** are best (30-22860-41309; anemomilosapartments.com; doubles, \$149-\$200).

HYDRA's *Second Act*

#73 Greece's first tourist hot spot, Hydra, fell out of favor in the sixties, its stylish clientele driven away by an excess of day-trippers. Today, though, the island is again attracting the stylist. High above the classic harbor—a horseshoe-shaped anchorage guarded by tall, somber captains'

houses—is the **Bratsera**, an 1860 sponge factory converted into a small hotel complete with a swimming pool (30-22980-53971; bratsera.com; doubles, \$188-\$265).

LEFKAS's *Nonpareil Beach*

#74 Porto Katsiki, the best beach in the whole of Greece, is reached through a steep pine forest that ends on high cliffs of white, brown, and gold limestone. Mighty boulders divide the beach into three areas, each with its own distinct mix of white pebbles, marble "buck shot," and white sand. Skip the mass of hotels in Nidri in favor of the **Hotel Lefkas** in Lefkada (30-26450-23916; e-lefkas.gr/hotellefkas; doubles, \$148).

MYKONOS's *Beautiful People*

#75 Despite 50 years of tourism, this tiny island retains its style and dignity. The white-cube architecture is a near-perfect backdrop for the *jeunesse dorée* who nightly stroll the winding streets. Newer hotels include the **Belvedere**, favored by Europeans (30-22890-25122; belvederehotel.com; doubles, \$382-\$751), and the **Saint John**, in the south (30-22890-28752; saintjohn.gr; doubles, \$349-\$401).

NISSYROS's *Smoldering Charms*

#76 If ever there was a volcano that could be described as charming, Nissyros is it. Once you arrive via an excursion boat from Kos (see kosinfo.gr), it's an easy

drive to the gently steaming caldera. At sea level, there's an excellent small restaurant in the little village of Mandraki and a ramshackle thermal spa, notable for its sulfurous waters.

SANTORINI's *Ultimate View*

#77 Perched nearly a thousand feet up on the lip of a huge sunken volcano, Fira is another fine white-cube hill town, albeit one beset by swarms of backpackers and cruise-boaters. By day, every wall is hung with tourist tat; by night, the air pulses with mind-numbing disco. The restored town of Oia shares an equally dramatic view of the volcano. Recommended hotels include the **Perivolos** (30-22860-71308; perivolos.gr; doubles, \$551) and **Zannos Melathron** (30-22860-28220; zannos.gr; suites, \$541-\$1,250).

SKIATHOS's *Beaches Galore*

#78 Much visited in the inter-war years by royalty and millionaires on yachts, Koukounaries Beach used to be regarded as the best, but there are many others. Current favorites include Mandraki, a bay concealed by huge pine trees, and Banana, for nudists. Skiathos Town has red-tiled roofs and has remained remarkably intact architecturally. Nearly infinite lodging options include sister hotels **The Bourtzi** and **The Pothos** (30-24270-21304; hotelbourtzi.gr; doubles, \$97-\$129 and \$65-\$104, respectively). —Ron Hall

tent national liquor, raki, and with pastries, fruit, cake, homemade goat cheese, and liters of local wine. They will give you for free everything they sell—and then, just sometimes, they will disappear. If they are under a certain age, if they are male, if they are unlucky. Indeed, this is no country for young men. But then again, maybe it never was.

The history of Crete is a tale of early death, of heroic self-sacrifice, of ferocious resistance to occupying powers, of often fatal nobility. When the Nazis invaded Crete in 1941, every man, woman, and child "ran to the nearest scene of action to attack the enemy, armed as they were, with guns that anyone would have sworn were taken from some museum," as George Psychoundakis reports in his classic World War II memoir, *The Cretan Runner*. The Greek army was on the mainland, fending off the Italians. At the time of the invasion, the only defenders left on the island were untrained, absurdly armed, and overwhelmingly courageous civilians.

Inevitably, they lost—but the damage they inflicted on the Nazis in the process is the stuff of legend. In the first day of the fighting alone, the Germans lost roughly two thousand

paratroopers. All through the occupation, they continued to lose face—and blood. The locals kidnapped their generals, provided shelter for their Allied enemies, and torched their airplanes. For this, they were brutally punished: Whole villages were burned to the ground, the young men methodically shot. Cretan losses were large, but Cretan pride was larger still.

In their centuries-long fight against successive occupiers—Romans, Venetians, and Turks—the Cretans have covered themselves in glory, if not always victory. To drive around the island as I did is to take a course not only in geographical splendor and social joie de vivre but in military heroism: Every monastery has been the scene of bloody self-sacrifice, every crumbling wall contains a Turkish cannonball, every beach cove has sheltered resistance fighters. In the most beautiful guest room I have ever inhabited, in the Elia Traditional Hotel, an old gun shaft is concealed under the writing desk.

What the Cretans have done in the service of freedom would cause many a medaled fighter-pilot of our day to blanch. But then again, the same fearless pride that drives their assault on oppressors also powers their blood feuds. Without a Ger-