

GREEK *Life*

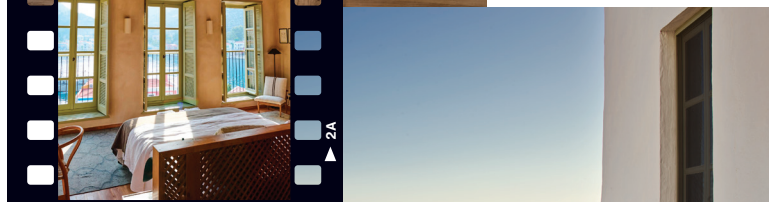
The GREEK ISLANDS may draw big crowds in summer, but in the OFF-SEASON they're BRIMMING with LIFE

Why would you go to Mykonos in August when there is so much beauty to discover in Greece all year round?" says Leda Athanasopoulou. "The late spring and fall on the Greek islands, especially the Dodecanese, are magic. You can still enjoy the weather and the sea, there are almost no crowds, and the natural environments change with the seasons." For the Greek-born artist and designer, the appeal of the islands lies less in the marquee destinations than in places where older ways of living are still embedded in the rhythms of daily life.

Athanasopoulou grew up in Thessaloniki but spent summers in Chora on **Patmos**, where her parents—acclaimed architect Katerina Tsigarida and businessman Dimitris Athanasopoulos—began restoring historic residences in the 1990s. A few years ago, she founded **Leda Space**, a collection of restored historic houses where she hosts and collaborates with makers like the artist Katerina Mourati, whose paintings, tapestries, and jewelry draw on ancient religious and mythological symbols. Athanasopoulou also designed one of the best places to stay on Patmos: **Pagostas**, the three-room former guesthouse of a nearby monastery that overlooks the Aegean and was conceived by Greek-born fashion entrepreneur Maria Lemos.

Lesvos, birthplace of the lyric poets Sappho and Alcaeus, holds a personal pull for Athanasopoulou, whose father introduced her as a child to the island's rich ceramics tradition. She recently returned, seeking out some of its remaining potters, including the Kourtzis family, who have made hand-painted ceramics in the village of Agiassos for six generations, and Dimitris Kouvdīs, who still fires pieces in a wood-burning kiln. That research resulted in a collection of vessels and objects shown at design curator Ambra Medda's AMO in Milan during Salone del Mobile in April. She also collaborated with painter Kyriakos Vacharakis on cast-aluminum interpretations of the classic Greek stackable chair. "If these crafts aren't supported financially or taken on by the next generation, they will disappear," she says. On Lesvos, Athanasopoulou likes to stay at **Hotel Delfinia** in Molyvos, swim in the thermal waters of **Eftalou** and the hot springs at **Gera** and **Polichnitos**, dine on fresh fish at **Nontas**, and visit the UNESCO-protected **Petrified Forest**.

Athanasopoulou recently also turned her attention to **Kastellorizo**, off Turkey's southern coast, where she is restoring a house that will eventually be available to rent through Leda Space. Until then, she suggests checking in to **Hotel Mediterraneo** or **Casa Mediterraneo**. She also advises visitors to read *The Colossus of Maroussi*, Henry Miller's exuberant 1941 travel memoir about friendship, wandering, and life in prewar Greece. "I feel like that's what my community is trying to do now: engage with each other and exchange ideas, knowledge, and experiences," she says. "It's harder to find during the high summer season, but there are still places where this kind of inspired energy and collaboration exists." HB



From top: A view from Pagostas on Patmos; Leda Athanasopoulou at her home in Chora; Lesvos-based artist Kyriakos Vacharakis; vessels and objects created with makers from Lesvos and stackable chairs designed with Vacharakis at AMO in Milan during Salone del Mobile this past April; accommodations at Casa Mediterraneo on Kastellorizo; Leda Space's Sekiari in Chora

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