Relaxed Rhodes
Want this popular Greek island all to yourself? Now’s the time...

The hordes have disappeared, the late-summer sun is still shining, and it’s less than four hours away. It doesn’t get any better than Rhodes right now. Add empty beaches, a seductive Medieval citadel, a surprisingly leafy interior and life lived firmly in the slow lane — all together, it’s the recipe for a truly laid-back getaway. By Lee Mannion

SEE & DO

Out of sultry high season, the 350 steps to the super-cute church at Tsambika don’t seem too painful, especially given the knockout coastline views of Rhodes Town to the north and ancient Lindos to the south (once you get there. Below you is Tsambika beach, the best on the island, with calm waters, loads of empty sand and a smattering of decent tavernas.

Not a beach person? Take a wander into the green interior, passing through shady oak forests scented with wild sage. A four-hour walk up the wooded mountain of Profitis Elias delivers deliciously cool hill breezes and clear views all the way to Turkey (we recommend the book Walking on Rhodes by Paul van Bodengraven and Marco Barten, published by One Day Walks Publishing; available at amazon.co.uk, from £6.55). The Medieval citadel of Lindos is straight out of a movie epic. White buildings tumble down the hillside like outsize sugar cubes, hemmed in by a mountain and a fortress; between them, the narrowest streets hide shaded cafes and cool boutiques. Climb the hill on foot or by donkey to the fourth-century acropolis (entry £5) and see the whole city laid out before you, then bathe like a local and jump into the water from the jetty, where day-tripping boats from Rhodes Town arrive. Swim to the right, through jade-coloured water, where there are caves to explore.

Beware of Greeks bearing goats — it means you’ll end up spending a whole afternoon lunching local-style on the aforementioned meat. Amid the pine forest of the hinterland, Apollona vinyard has lots of restaurants and is a much-loved spot for long Sunday meals. The dish to order is tender baked goat casserole with giant beans.

ItAKE a while to do the weekly shop on Rhodes, and involves trips to the world’s sleepiest high streets. Start in Siana and wander along slame where a scattering of stones and market-stalls sell locally made thyme-scented honey and olive oil. Then drive the 15km to Embonas village to taste wine produced by the island’s vinters. It’s potent, if not award-winning.

Take to the water. Curving like a backbone at the bottom of the island, the strange, desert-like spit of sand at Prasonisi is blustery to say the least. Its western beach is popular with kite-surfers, but a gentler breeze and shallow sea on the eastern edge mean prime windsurf-lesson territory. Falling in is half the fun (prasonisicenter.com; two-hour equipment hire, £32pp).

Shop, bar- and restaurant-hop through Rhodes Old Town, Europe’s oldest inhabited Medieval city. A Unesco World Heritage site since 1988, it has four kilometres of pebbled lanes and alleyways to explore behind its old defensive walls. Leather goods and jewellery are the things to buy, and you can pepper your shopping with pitstops at hip bars and trad tavernas.

Take the ocean road. Hire a car to explore Rhodes’s sleepy west coast, darting between the tiny seaside towns south of Ixia, passing turquoise coves that make bathing stops irresistible. Atholmnia, follow the road as it heads high up the hills. Your destination: Bakis Brothers in Embonas (00 30 22460 41247; mains about £11), for a plate of the best grilled meat to be found on the island. If you’re wondering why octopuses are hanging from the rafters of so many houses, it’s because sun-drying is the traditional Greek way to tenderise them.
**EAT**

**Laid-back beach shack**

**BANANA TREE, TSAMBIAKI**

(‘Mains about €18)

Because: Pre-holiday stress goes out the window at this waterside shack, which serves bagan-inspired salads. Others’ tip: Don’t fret about finding this place among the other beach tavernas. Just look for the gigantic fake banana swaying above it. Tsambiaki beach

**Stand-out spot**

**MAMA SOPHIA, RHODES TOWN**

(‘Mains about €10)

Because: This is the undisputed inside-rinse of restaurants with waiters inviting you to sit down as you wander through the Old Town. Worth a stop even if you're not hungry, and the people-watching is great. **Travel’s tip:** Traditional Greek dishes are the way to go if you need choice. They serve only about £13)

**BEACHES & SWIMS**

**ISLAND BEACH BAR, RHODES TOWN**

(‘Mains about £10)

Because: It’s the best place in Rhodes to catch a sunset, with bobbing boats in the foreground. **Travel’s tip:** It’s hard to find — take a left after you’ve passed all the bars on leafy Eucalyptus Avenue. Kolympia beach (00 30 22445 52650)

**Fish central**

**ST PALLAS, LINDOS**

Because: Just below the fortress of Lindos Town, this tiny bay is quiet and sheltered. **Travel’s tip:** Take your snorkeles — there are plenty of frothing outy cool, wondrous natural caves.

**Classic swim**

**KALLITHEA SPRINGS, FALIRAKI**

Because: Just a five minute beach from Faliraki is famously debauched stretch, these thermal springs are more Bezan Beach Club than Rhodes Uncovered. **Travel’s tip:** Head inside to see restored 200m mosaic floors and magnificent arches, leading to a swimming platform strewn with wicker sofas and white umbrellas. Kollithos Springs (00 30 22440 65969, kollitheosprings.gr)

**ASK THE LOCAL**

Sofia Mailli has worked in Lardos, on the south of the island, for the past seven years.

“I’m from Rhodes Town but fell in love with the south of the island, for the past seven years.

**STAY**

**ELAFOS HOTEL, PROFITIS ILIAS**

(‘Doubles from €35, B&B)

Because: This is something completely different—a chalet built by Italians, 780m up in the inland forest. **Travel’s tip:** Ask for a room at the back, for astounding views towards Turkey. Profitis Ilias (00 30 22440 48808, elafoshotel.gr)

**Starry stay**

**RODOS PALACE, IXIA** (‘Doubles from €61)

Because: This concrete behemoth looks old but the rooms have been updated. It has had some illustrious guests. Thatcher (Margaret and Bon Jovi) in this case, Roger Moore (have both checked in, and the location is pretty, the sea looks onto the beach, with Rhodes Town just five minutes away. **Travel’s tip:** The gardens are secret, hidden with wisteria—producers selling fruit, herbs and olive oil.

**THE ROMANTIC B&B**

**NIKOLIS HOTEL, RHODES TOWN**

(‘Doubles from £63, ‘romanticaly) Because: The plant-covered sandstone facade of this charming hotel, one quiet cobblestone street in the Medieval Old Town, hides some delectable rustic-boutique hotels. Plus, there’s a lovely shaded patio garden. **Travel’s tip:** Whatever you do, don’t skip breakfast. It’s served on the roof terrace, which has gaast—inducing views of the town and harbour. 6 Hippodromos Str, Old Town (00 30 22440 34561, s-nikolis.gr)

**GOOD NIGHT**

**SPIRIT OF THE KNIGHTS, RHODES TOWN**

(‘Doubles from £83, B&B)

Because: This stunning faux village in the Spirit of the Knights Rhodes Town, the sheepskin Greek velvet transparent to the spotless Knight’s Gate, Paul’s Storey, Lardos, with the exclamation (the background) Kallithos Springs, Faliraki

**GET ME THERE**

**GO INDEPENDENT**

EasyJet (£20) flies from Liverpool and Gatwick to £27 one—way. Jet2 (£20) flies from Glasgow, Manchester, East Midlands, Newcastle and Leeds Bradford to Rhodes from £27 return. Ryanair £31 return (01488 689700, thomascook.com) flies from nine UK airports, from £37 return. **Travel’s tip:** Avoid the huge, swaying above it.

**WRITE A TIP**

Not all beachfront properties lead to the sunnier shores of Pollo beach — it’s about 5km away.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

See visitgreece.gr.