Set on a hilly, wooded peninsula extending deep into slate-coloured Lake Orestiádha, KASTORIÁ is one of the most interesting and attractive towns of mainland Greece. For centuries it grew rich on the fur trade, using the pelts of local wild beavers (kastóri in Greek). Though these animals were trapped to extinction by the nineteenth century, Kastoriá still supports a considerable industry of furriers using a mixture of imported pelts and locally farmed beavers. You’ll see pelts drying on racks, and fur megastores with profuse Russian signposting hinting at the target market. The town also has a strong tradition of rowing, and rowers can be seen out on the lake most days. Even the Oxford and Cambridge Blues have been known to practise their strokes here. Continue reading to find out more about... Karýdhis Folklore museum Byzantine Museum Lake Orestiádha Mavriótissa monastery The Dragon’s Cave (Spiliá tou Dhrákou) Dhispílio prehistoric lake settlement Kastoriá’s churches For most visitors, however, Kastoriá’s main appeal lies in traces of its former prosperity: dozens of splendid arhondiká – mansions of the old fur families – dating from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, plus some fifty Byzantine and medieval churches. About the only reminder of Muslim settlement is the minaret-less Koursoún Tzamí, marooned in a ridgetop car park; there’s also a patch of an originally Byzantine fortification wall down on the neck of the peninsula. **Karýdhis** For a sense of what Kastoriá must once have been during its heyday, head for the former lakeside quarter officially called Karýdhis but better known as Dóltso. Among the notable mansions in the area are Bassáras and Natzís, close together on Vyzandíon; the latter was admirably restored in the 1990s. A third, also close by, on Platía Dóltso, now houses the Traditional Costume Museum (open by appointment; free;24670 22697), a magical display of traditional clothing from western Macedonia and a chance to see another magnificent interior. **Folklore museum** The splendidly opulent seventeenth-century Aïvazís family mansion has been turned into a Folklore Museum. The house was inhabited until 1972 and its furnishings and most of its ceilings are in excellent repair, having miraculously survived German shelling; the Ottoman-style kiosk sports a set of stained-glass windows, three of them original, the others replaced by a local craftsman. Other features are an oriental fireplace in the master bedroom and the kitchen with all the original pots and pans. **Byzantine Museum** The Byzantine Museum, up on Platía Dhexamenís, wisely goes for quality over quantity in this well-lit if unimaginatively displayed collection spanning the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Highlights include an unusually expressive thirteenth-century icon of Áyios Nikólaos and a fourteenth-century Ayii Anaryiri, plus a later one depicting the life of St George. There are also a few double-sided icons, including a rare Deposition, intended for use in religious processions. Captions are in Greek only. **Lake Orestiádha** One of the most pleasant things to do in Kastoriá is to follow the narrow road along Lake Orestiádha to the peninsula to the east of town; at the tip vehicles must circulate anticlockwise, but the route is mainly used by joggers and the odd walker. Although the lake itself is visibly polluted, wildlife still abounds – pelicans, swans, frogs, tortoises and water snakes especially, and on a spring day numerous fish break water. **Mavriótissa monastery** Near the southeastern tip of the peninsula, some 3km along from the Hotel Kastoria, stands the Mavriótissa monastery, flanked by peacocks and a fair-value restaurant. Two churches are all that remains of the monastery: a smaller fourteenth-century chapel, with fine frescoes of scenes from Christ’s life, abutting the larger, wood-roofed eleventh-century katholikón on whose outer wall looms a well-preserved Tree of Jesse, showing the genealogy of the Saviour. **The Dragon’s Cave (Spiliá tou Dhrákou)** Given its name because the entrance resembles the mouth of a dragon and an old legend claimed there was a resident one that spouted fire if anyone approached, the Dragon’s Cave was discovered in 1940 but only opened to the public in 2010. The interior is festooned with an impressive array of stalgmites and stalactites and there are some patches of lake within, around which walkways have been carefully constructed. **Dhispílio prehistoric lake settlement** On the southern shore of the lake lie the remains of a fascinating prehistoric lake settlement, which is thought to date from around 5500–5000 BC during the Neolithic Period. First excavated in 1992, finds include a range of household goods and a wooden tablet, inscribed with an early linear script. A modern re-creation of the original huts and an eco-museum help bring to life what the area must have looked like in these distant times. **Kastoriá’s churches** Of the town’s many Byzantine churches, a handful are well worth seeking out. The excellent frescoes of the twelfth-century church of Áyios Nikólaos Kasnítzi were returned to their former glory during the late 1980s. The unusual epithet stems from the donor, who is shown with his wife on the narthex wall presenting a model of the church to Christ. Lower down are ranks of exclusively female saints, to console the women congregated in the narthex which long served as a women’s gallery. High up on the west wall of the nave, the Dormition and the Transfiguration are in good condition, the former inexplicably backwards (the Virgin’s head is usually to the left). Taxiárhes tís Mitropóleos, the oldest (ninth-century) church, was built on the foundations of an earlier pagan temple, of which recycled columns and capitals are visible. Its more prominent frescoes, such as that of the Virgin Platytera and Adoring Archangels in the conch of the apse, and a conventional Dormition on the west wall, are fourteenth century. In the north aisle is the tomb of Greek nationalist Pavlos Melas, assassinated by Bulgarians at a nearby village in 1906, and commemorated by street names across northern Greece. Lastly, the Panayía Koumbelidhikí, so named because of its unusual dome (kübe in Turkish), retains one startling and well-illuminated fresco: a portrayal – almost unique in Greece – of God the Father in a ceiling mural of the Holy Trinity. The building was constructed in stages, with the apse completed in the tenth century and the narthex in the fifteenth. The cylindrical dome was meticulously restored after being destroyed by Italian bombing in 1940.