

Athens

ALATSI

The famously healthy cooking of Crete, with its use of olive oil, vegetables, fruit and yogurt, is all the rage in Athens right now, and popular Alatsi is the place to sample this cuisine at its finest. Watch for chef Dimitris Skarmoutsos' fine dolmadakia, grape leaves stuffed with rice and Cretan herbs; gamopilafo, a pilaf made with rich stock and ewe's milk butter; snails boubouristi (fried in olive oil, vinegar and rosemary); and cabbage rice with smoked pork. Vrasida 13 (US\$50)

ATHIRI

Chef Alexandros Kardasis has moved this deservedly popular restaurant to an attractive new downtown location in a renovated old house on fashionable Plateon Street. His menu changes regularly, but don't miss the Santorini fava beans with caper leaves and caper oil, one of the best Greek salads in Athens, and the succulent stuffed squid with shrimp and vegetables. The grilled grouper with lemon-scented oil is delicious. Plateon 15, Keramikos (US\$65)

MAMACAS

Rather more stylish than the typical Athens taverna, this all-white restaurant decorated with twinkling lights attracts a well-heeled international crowd and serves very good Greek classics such as fava bean purée, stuffed grape leaves and grilled lamb chops. The wine list demonstrates that there is much more to Greek vineyards than the ubiquitous Retsina. Request a terrace table when the weather is good. Persefonis 41 (US\$60)

PAPADAKIS

Located in the city's chic Kolonaki neighborhood, this excellent seafood restaurant has fine views and serves one of the best catch-of-the-day menus in Athens. Follow one of the outstanding starters — maybe Aegean shrimp sautéed in garlic, hot peppers and olive oil, or tender octopus salad served on a bed of diced boiled potatoes in a lemony dressing — with grilled grouper for two and a side of delicious boiled wild greens. Fokilidou 15 (US\$75)

VAROULKO

Many Athenians consider chef-owner Lefteris Lazarou's establishment, with its stunning views of the Acropolis, to be the best seafood restaurant in the city. The catch of the day varies, of course, but dishes not to miss include angoustines in tomato broth, and grilled octopus. Be forewarned that the fish here is sold according to weight, so it's usually wise to ask the price to avoid an unpleasant surprise. Peiraios 80 (US\$150)