

# EASY DOES IT ON AN AEGEAN ISLAND

**KEA, GREECE** Aglaia Kremezi is a little spark plug of a woman, constantly running around, her wild curly hair bouncing with each step. A cookbook author and newspaper columnist, she also runs a culinary program called **Kea Artisanal**, where her frenetic energy contrasts sharply with the peaceful atmosphere on the sleepy island of Kea, about two hours from Athens by ferry. The town of Ioulis consists of little more than whitewashed houses and chapels, a quaint graveyard, and an occasional donkey making its way through the narrow cobblestone streets. During my weeklong trip, we spent half our time exploring the island—walking among ruins and relaxing on sandy beaches, some still littered with fragments of ancient pottery—and the other half cooking at Aglaia's home, just outside of town, near the sea and the marina. The class days started early, and Aglaia organized each lesson around a theme—such as phyllo, bread, or olives—with recipes involving each, as well as sides and salads to accompany them. I not only learned to make phyllo dough but also discovered countless ways to fill it. I stuffed grape leaves torn right from the vine and layered flatbread with feta and Aglaia's Greek-spiced tomato sauce. At a sunset beach barbecue, I had the tenderest grilled octopus I'd ever tasted. (011-30-22880-21-91-7; keartisanal.com; \$2,339 for six days, including most meals) —*Andrea Albin*

**WHAT I LEARNED** How to make a great one-pot dinner by searing chunks of lamb shoulder, adding beans, and layering stuffed grape leaves on top. As the dish cooks, the flavors meld together beautifully. **BIGGEST SURPRISE** How simple it is to cure your own olives, with whatever herbs and spices strike your fancy. **BEFORE YOU GO** Kea is an island, and bad weather can keep the ferry in port for a couple of days at a time. Be prepared for unanticipated layovers. **WHERE TO STAY** **Porto Kea Suites** (011-30-22880-22-87-0; portokeasuites.com; from \$152). About ten minutes from the school (they pick you up), this is the only high-end hotel on the island. Ask for a sea view.

## EGGPLANT AND WALNUT PHYLLO PIE

Adapted from Aglaia Kremezi, Kea Artisanal, Kea, Greece

SERVES 6 TO 8

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 3 HR

*Panfried eggplant, walnuts, and cheese melt into each other and make a rich filling between crisp layers of phyllo in this hearty, meat-free pie.*

- 3 (1-lb) eggplants, peeled and cut into ½-inch-thick rounds
- About 1½ cups olive oil, divided
- 3 medium leeks (white and pale green parts only)
- 2 cups coarsely grated *graviera* or sharp white Cheddar (5 oz)
- ¾ cup coarsely grated Kefalotyri or Pecorino Romano (2½ oz)
- 1½ cups walnuts (5½ oz), chopped
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 20 (12- by 7-inch) phyllo sheets, thawed if frozen

► Sprinkle eggplant with 1½ teaspoons salt and drain in a colander 30 minutes; pat dry. ► Heat 3 tablespoons oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until hot, then fry eggplant in batches, adding about 3 tablespoons oil per batch and turning once, until tender and golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes total per batch. Drain on paper towels and cool to room temperature. Wipe skillet clean. ► Preheat oven to 375°F with rack in middle. ► Halve leeks lengthwise and thinly slice. Wash (see Tips, page 206) and drain. ► Cook leeks in 2 tablespoons oil in skillet over medium heat until golden, 7 to 9 minutes. Transfer to a bowl. ► Chop eggplant; add to leeks with cheeses, nuts, cumin, and salt and pepper to taste. ► Trim phyllo sheets into 9-inch squares. Cover stack of phyllo with plastic wrap and a damp kitchen towel. Layer 10 sheets in a 9-inch square baking dish, lightly brushing each sheet with oil. Spread filling on top, then cover with remaining phyllo, brushing each sheet with oil. ► Cut several slits in phyllo (to vent) and bake until puffed and golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes.

Eggplant and walnut phyllo pie; classes at Aglaia Kremezi's Kea Artisanal often include a visit to the butcher shop of Nikos Mavromatis.

