

owner Mrs Niki Spanou creating some tasty meals using fresh local ingredients.

'Meat or fish?' asks Kostas. We're on the coast, so it has to be fish – and what a treat as the dishes keep coming until we're absolutely stuffed. There are freshly caught sardines, bream, cuttlefish cooked in ink, tender calamari, shellfish, potato cake with herring roe and much more. It's like no Greek restaurant I've ever been to before, and highly recommended if you're in the area.

The gourmet experience continues the next morning after a good night's sleep at the guest house. We sample freshly baked bread, local honey and jam.

I realise this is sounding more like celebrity chef Rick Stein's Greek Odyssey than an off-road driving adventure, but we're soon on our way to the first track, which is just a few hundred metres away.

With the Aegean sparkling in the sunlight to our right, the route twists and turns through apple orchards, olive groves and vineyards. Almond trees are in full bloom and the grass banks are speckled with vibrant purple anemones.

After a while, the track drops through a series of hairpins to a white sandy beach. This is one of Kostas's favourite wild camping locations and is where

his groups can stay overnight. 'This is a magical place to camp,' he says, 'with the sea lapping gently on the beach. And in the morning the sun comes up directly over the horizon.'

We should be driving a further two hours on mountain tracks to Volos, but there are still some deep snowdrifts from the recent blizzard, so we're forced to backtrack and bypass by tarmac.

The 2917-metre Mount Olympus can be seen in the far distance to our right as we head north-west towards the next overnight stop at Kalabaka. This town is bustling with tourists attracted by the mighty Meteora sandstone pillars that tower up to 550 metres above it. Some of these have monasteries perched precariously on them and you can't help thinking that the monks who built them back in the 14th century must have seriously wanted to get away from it all.

It's a tourist magnet, but I'm pleased to see that the local authority welcomes 4x4s and trail bikes, with clear signs pointing to tracks near the rocks. What a contrast to the UK's popular tourist areas, which never publicise greenlanes.

After a night in the comfortable Elena guest house, complete with balcony looking out on to the rocks, we drive

Taking in the views at Lake Plastiras



south, cutting through the Pindos mountain region – mainland Greece's rockiest area. We're heading for Lake Plastiras, a picturesque artificial lake created by building a dam during the 1950s. Sitting 1000 metres above sea level, the lake is named after the military general Nikolaos Plastiras who later became prime minister. Plastiras is credited with visualising the idea of creating the 400 million cubic-metre



Splendid Greek food...

'WE HEAD TOWARD KOSTAS AND ELENI'S HOME IN THE CONSIDERABLE SHADOW OF THE 1750-METRE MOUNT DIRFIS, A SNOW-CAPPED EXTINCT VOLCANO THAT LOOKS LIKE JAPAN'S MOUNT FUJI'

