

## Christmas lights give family a festive shock

*A family of four had to be rescued from their third-floor apartment in the western Athens suburb of Peristeri early yesterday after a fire, probably caused by faulty Christmas lights, swept through the property.*

*The fire service was called to the building at 3 a.m. after the couple and their two children, aged 8 and 4 years old, became trapped on their balcony in an attempt to escape the blaze.*

*Firefighters used a ladder truck to help the family to safety. All four members were taken to the hospital for precautionary checks, but were not found to be suffering from any burns or problems caused by smoke inhalation.*

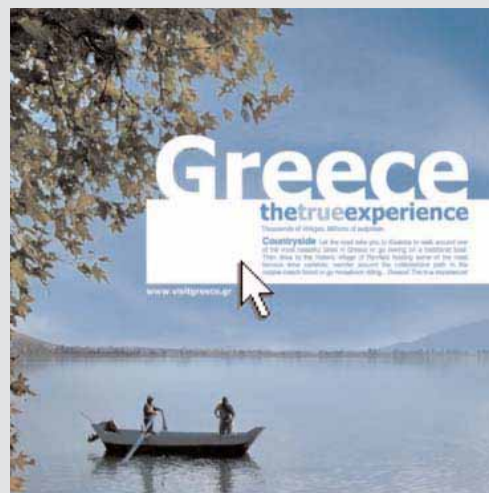
*It took 30 firefighters and 10 fire engines another four hours to completely put out the blaze. The fire service said that it is looking into the possibility that the fire was caused by Christmas lights in the apartment.*

## UK travelers take a pass on Greece

Now that the euro has pretty much reached parity with the British pound, the UK travel industry is anxious to see what the new year will bring. After a dismal November and December, Spain and Greece were the two countries suffering the most from the weak pound with a 20% fall in bookings from the UK. Greek tourism officials have also come under fire for failing to respond to the downturn.

At a recent annual travel conference in London, the CEO of Thomas Cook (a leading UK travel group) told the press “The Greek Tourism Minister has been pretty hopeless. “The guy is under pressure, but to come to World Travel Market for three days and to be too busy to meet with the UK travel industry is outrageous.”

On the other hand, some non euro zone countries like Turkey have seen business from the UK shoot up 20%.



# Conservation team celebrates 25 years of dedicated work

## Sea turtle protection society sets example for saving precious ecosystems

There are those who wonder why so much energy should be expended to save just a single species of fauna when so many human beings are destitute. For Anna Margaritoulis, co-founder of the Archelon Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, it's a question of justice.

We have to learn to respect the space of every living creature on the planet. Only then can we respect our fellow human beings, she said in an interview with Kathimerini's Eco magazine this month.

Archelon has just celebrated its 25th anniversary. Anna and Dimitris Margaritoulis explained how their interest began much earlier, on a camping trip to Dafni, a beach on the island of Zakynthos.

“One morning, we saw tracks in the sand that we thought had been made by a tractor, but the next morning they were there again. We stayed up that night to wait, and saw baby turtles hatching, explained Dimitris. That night, our lives changed. Local fishermen knew that some of the island beaches were the sea turtles breeding grounds, but the scientific community appeared to be unaware.

Dimitris, a physicist who worked for the Hellenic Telecommunications Organization, and his wife Anna got in touch with American universities and organized groups of students from Thessaloniki University to collect data. They gradually realized that Zakynthos



was far more than a turtle breeding ground but a biotope that was vital to the survival of the species. However, the island also had a rapidly developing mass tourism industry.

Problems began back in 1981 when the beaches where the turtles came to lay their eggs began to be invaded by the tourist trade, but there was nothing we could do because of the lack of legislation, explained Dimitris. Then, in 1982, Environment Minister Antonis Tritsis suspended all building permit licenses in the area pending an investigation. The next

day in Zakynthos we came under fire. That was the beginning of the idea for Archelon. Since then, all the island's turtle nesting beaches have been pinpointed, as well as others at Kyparissia on the western coast of the Peloponnese, and in Crete. In 2000, a conservation park was established on Zakynthos but only after the country risked a penalty from the European Union. Buildings have been illegally erected on the beach at Dafni, and some locals are still opposing the association work, but not as violently as at first.

In contrast to Kyparissia, the beaches on Zakynthos are small and narrow. Even if one taverna goes up, it affects the whole beach, said Dimitris.

But the turtles keep coming back to the same places each year to lay their eggs.

We have found that turtles which lay their eggs in Greece spend the winter in Tunisia and the northern Adriatic. They travel over 1,000 kilometers to get here.

According to a survey compiled by Thessaloniki University, the *Caretta caretta* is the most popular of Greece threatened animal species, and that is largely due to the work of Archelon.

Turtles aren't pretty animals but are docile; they are not aggressive creatures, said Anna. We recently discovered that the sex of a turtle is determined by the temperature at the time it hatches. Higher temperatures result in females, lower ones in males. At present on Zakynthos, on the beach at Marathonisi, 10 percent of the population born there are males. If the temperatures rise as a result of global warming, there will be a problem, said Dimitris.

## Another clue in police shooting

The two Kalashnikov rifles used to fire on a police bus last week had not been used in Greece before, according to tests carried out by anti-terrorism experts.

Sources revealed on the weekend that an examination of the bullet casings found at the scene of the shooting last Tuesday indicated that these weapons had not been used in any other attack, robbery or other criminal incident in Greece. The shots were fired from the grounds of the University of Athens's residence halls, known as Panepistimioupolis. One bullet blew out two tires on the bus, while another struck the engine. Authorities believe that at least two people were involved in the attack and that a third person was probably acting as a lookout for the gunmen. There has been no statement so far from police on whether they believe it was the action of a domestic terrorist organization, such as Revolutionary Struggle, or an anti-establishment group that has decided to use more extreme means to make their point.

Interior Minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos refrained from speculating. “Until the end of the investigation, I will not draw any conclusions,” he said in an interview with the weekly Real News. “What I can say is that criminal and provocative elements, which have no connection to the student movement and the university, are trying to cause confusion at universities but they will not succeed.”

Police sources told Kathimerini that authorities are concerned that a hardcore body of domestic terrorists may be using the recent shooting of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos by a special guard as well as the events that followed it as an opportunity to recruit new blood into the organization. Pavlopoulos defended his statement on the day after the teenager was killed, in which he said the police would be “on the defensive.”

“Defending does not mean you adopt a passive stance,” said Pavlopoulos. “I defend means that I protect and support.”