



**IN SEASON FROM FIELD TO PLATE**

**THE MEDITERRANEAN ISSUE**

Essays from Chef Nikki Rose

## Why this issue?

I grew up in Europe. My parents lived in France until recently. They migrated back to Southern Portugal to enjoy a Mediterranean lifestyle they have known and loved for as long as I can remember. Even though Portugal does not border this famous inland sea, its southern region adopts its way of life and that is what my parents yearn for. Now the Mediterranean I know the best is the coastal region of the South of France that runs into Italy. Nikki Rose's Mediterranean is the Greek Mediterranean, and more specifically the Isle of Crete.

Nikki, my parents and I share a few things in common about the Mediterranean. We understand that there is no common Mediterranean food culture. There can't be. This inland sea is bordered on the north by Europe, the east by Asia, and in the south by Africa. This 969,100 sq. mile body of water is approximately 2,300 miles in length. Countries that border the Mediterranean Sea include Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The food that my parents eat in Portugal, and how they prepare it, is so different from my beloved Provence or the Italian Riviera. And the fish that Nikki's friends harvest from the waters of the Mediterranean surrounding Crete, or the wild greens she plucks from the island mountainsides, has never graced my plate in Provence or my parents in the Algarve. But we are united in our understanding of the Mediterranean. For us, we all understand deeply that the Mediterranean is first and foremost, *a way of life*. Mediterranean means a sense of season which has a sense of place, with a sense of time, wrapped in a sense of community. For us, Mediterranean is the position of the sun in the sky, the farms, the markets, the wine, the sea and the sense of community in our cafes and at our tables. Food is a part of our togetherness, and it is celebrated, not for its science or healthful qualities, but for its identity with history, culture and above all, community.

This special issue reflects the brilliant work and perspective of Nikki Rose, Field to Plate's culinary-cultural business partner in the Mediterranean. We chose to showcase Nikki's work because her approach to the Mediterranean Diet is one of pure pragmatism. While her essays are written from a Greek Mediterranean perspective, the ideas and observations can be applied around the Mediterranean. Her no-nonsense approach to the facts and the diet is a refreshing read in a world overstuffed with perhaps a little too much Mediterranean Diet research. Nikki presents the diet in perspective, and in a way that she and I have always known and loved it.

*"A way of eating that is a way of life. To eat like a Mediterranean, you must live like one."*

**Amanda Archibald, Field to Plate**

## Contents



**The Mediterranean Diet: Whose on it anyway?**



**Maintaining the Mediterranean's Heritage**



**Eat like a Cretan**



**Med Diet Greek Style**

## The Mediterranean Diet. Who's on it anyway?

What's the Mediterranean diet and who's on it anyway? Break out the world atlas and take a look at the size of the Mediterranean region – the sea touches the shores of many distinctly different countries. Wow, does everybody eat the same thing everywhere? I've noticed that some countries have been excluded from the Mediterranean Diet Club and are not even featured in those coffee-table cookbooks – membership may have required a stable government and luxury hotel accommodations for the research teams. How about the cultural, agricultural, climatic, religious, economic influences of The Club members – are they all the same? Are we missing some great stories behind traditional dishes by deeming the entire region one generic Oliveland?

Sure, “fusion cuisine” is the creative incorporation of flavors from other lands, but when you see a dish on a California menu like “moussaka-canneloni” (two distinctly traditional dishes from two different countries all rolled into one) is it fusion or confusion? Cuisine and culture go hand in hand and the more global we get the less homogeneous we should be. The window into the culture of a nation is through the kitchen -- you can learn so much about people when you know what they eat and why. What would New Englanders do if their beloved clam chowder was renamed “North American Clam Stew”? Even America has diverse and interesting regional cuisine – more than the rap it gets overseas as a burgers & fries nation, right?



### The History of The Diet

Recap on the history of The Diet phenomenon. Back in the late 1950's an American physiologist, Dr. Ancel Keys, discovered that many Cretan men living in the mountain villages had a very low rate of heart disease and cancer and lived to a very ripe old age. He noted that they consumed lots of olive oil, but also looked at the bigger picture (which is blurry now) of traditional Cretan cuisine and lifestyle as a whole. Dr. Keys conducted a 15-year comparative study of the cardiac disease and cancer rate in Greece (Crete and Corfu), Finland, Japan, Italy, The Netherlands, The United States, and Yugoslavia (known as the “Seven-Country Study,” although the demographics seem odd). The results of the study proved his hunch with low instances of either disease in Crete and high instances in all other countries compared, except Japan, which did not fare too badly. Hence, The Diet was born.

When a story is passed on through the years, it tends to vary (even to a level of sensationalism, as is the case here). Olive oil was cited as a piece of the puzzle but the remaining pieces were lost along the way. The Diet has taken many marketing twists and turns since – everyone wants to be a Club Member, whether they've paid their dues or not. Ironically, Italy and France have managed to become Club Members, yet the cardiovascular disease rates in both countries have never coincided with The Diet's premise. Granted, both countries eat some of the same foods as the people of Crete and produce and consume their own olive oil -- Italy even buys olive oil in bulk from Greece for their own labels. However, Italy was a losing country in the comparative study and just last year in France, a group of cardiovascular disease patients were placed on the traditional diet of Crete (not Provence) with very positive results.

None of this matters because the French and Italians are very good at marketing -- so why bring up some old story about Crete and risk competition? I don't think the competition would be too fierce because Cretans seem perfectly content with the way things are. I imagine there are many reasons why they haven't flooded international markets with their precious goods. The Diet's premise was based on principals of traditional Cretan cooking and lifestyle, but the interpretations we see today change the rules of the game.

So olive oil is good for us. That can't be the end of the story because I'm almost sure we cannot survive on olive oil alone. Those healthy olive oil fanatics must be eating something else to balance out this picture of gastronomic utopia. Just within the isle of Crete the cuisine differs from region to region and there are many great stories -- often dating back thousands of years -- behind every traditional dish. That's what makes the food and culture so special.

### **Geography, Climate and Lifestyle Shape Local Cuisine**

As these studies emerged from Crete thirty years ago, a bit has changed since then. So what hasn't changed? First, there's the geography and climate factor. Crete is a mountainous, rocky island with only a few big cities and all that goes with them -- like pollution. Aside from seasonal tourist spots, this is farming and fishing country, not a metropolis. Olive and nut groves, fruit orchards, grape vines and greenhouses cover nearly every inch of available land. The summers are long, hot and dry and winters are relatively mild with snowfall only in the mountains. The produce is plentiful with intense concentrated flavor and color. The down side (for farmers, not holiday makers) is this seasonal drought – making life more difficult than it already is. Olive trees grow miraculously out of dry, rocky earth, that's why there's more olives here than anything else. Cow's milk butter is a luxury item, as this arid, mountainous land is not fit for cows.

Deep green, pungent extra virgin olive oil is produced in nearly every tiny village, usually

only by and for the community (the private reserve of gold). Throughout Greece, many people would not dream of purchasing olive oil in a supermarket – they either make it themselves or know someone who does. Everyone is partial to their own village oil and even if they've moved away, they often return home to help during harvest season or have a supply sent to them – it's that important. There are several large cooperatives in Crete who share their olive oil with the rest of the world and most still follow traditional production methods – some have won top quality awards in International competitions. Why not? The Greeks have had thousands of years of experience in olive oil production – the ancient Minoans traded it for precious metals and gems.

As for exercise, farming is hard, physical labor so there's no need to drive to the gym after work (haven't seen one yet). People are too busy tending to their land or animals to sit at a computer and surf the net --even if they could justify the need for a computer (the "net" is quite useful in the collection of fish). Even if they're not farmers by trade, many people have a small patch of land for fruit and nut trees, a vegetable garden and enough chickens for the family – and maybe a few sheep or goats. Mostly for practical and financial reasons, they also make a lot all their own foods like bread, cheese, yogurt, vinegar, wine, etc., and pesticides are not even an option.



There's plenty of seafood – more frequently consumed by the locals who live near the sea, often because it's their own catch or that of another family member.

Recent scientific studies have proven that fish is very good for us – so dash out and get some! There are many villages tucked so far into the mountains that I'm amazed that people manage to survive there – but they

have for this very reason. Throughout history the unwelcome visitor (aka invader) to these parts has been met with Homeric resistance. Hence, many traditional dishes (with great stories to match the flavor) from mountain villages are based on survival tactics and the art of foraging for food in the wild – now it's posh.

So, depending on where they live, some people eat more fresh fish than others -- cured fish being the norm in the mountains. Many villages were inhabited long before the automobile, refrigeration (stable or mobile) was invented, some originally dating back nearly 4000 years. Even with today's modern roadways and vehicles providing faster access to the shore, there's traditional regional cuisine – which is not budging any time soon. Most traditional dishes center around religious holidays – and eating certain foods like meat and dairy products is prohibited for long periods of time each year. In essence, Greeks who follow their traditional religious calendar are part-time vegetarians. Times are changing, but we still have a chance to discover what's cooking here and why this little pocket of the world is so important to modern scientists, nutritionists – and us.

## Scientific Application in Action: Eating

Well, that's all very nice, you say. We're still standing at the open fridge waiting for cooking advice – ready to devour a bag of chips fried in some deadly oil just to take the edge off. Wait! The common denominator is those dreaded fresh fruits and vegetables – tons of them. Every day on the average Cretan dinner table, there may be a selection of five or six simply prepared vegetables – not just a dollop of spinach fighting for recognition on the edge of a plate of prime rib. Simple salads with tomatoes, cucumber, green pepper, onion and olives are the norm for lunch AND dinner. Roasted and marinated green and red peppers, beets, wild or cultivated greens, artichokes, zucchini and eggplant are also hot ticket items.

Cretans eat lots of dried beans like yellow split peas (called fava), broad beans, chickpeas and lentils. Some beans are just cooked until tender, mashed a little bit and mixed with olive oil, onion and salt. There are many different types of freshly baked bread, which is always on the table. The finale is usually seasonal fruit (not baklava, etc.) like cherries, honeydew and watermelon, grapes, figs, pomegranate, apples and oranges. We should be very jealous because a lot of this stuff is also organic – a very expensive option for us – it's too late, they've paved our paradise.

Aside from the popular grilled or skewered chicken, pork or lamb (souvlaki), there are a few things that Cretans eat on a regular basis but are rarely mentioned in fancy food publications – maybe because of the shock factor – like snails from the mountains, octopus, sardines, smelts and other small, whole fish (crispy heads, bones, fins and all are consumed), rabbit and other wild game, and some meats from head to foot on occasion. Most people from industrialized (or paved) nations prefer not to know if and when they're eating animal meat or innards – that's why we have hot dogs, sausages or fancy paté – to cover up the evidence. There's plenty of pigs' head served in upscale Parisian restaurants – and some may find it more acceptable when presented on silver trays in a sauce with other delicacies they can't pronounce.

As for starches and things, potatoes, pasta, barley, and rice are prepared in many different ways – with a pretty even percentage of weekly consumption. Potatoes are often just baked or fried in a little olive oil, or steamed with other vegetables for hot or cold combinations. Rice seasoned with onions and spices, is frequently used as a stuffing for many different vegetables and the infamous grape leaves – which are great when made fresh.

Then there's yogurt – eaten straight, used in savory sauces, topped with fresh fruit, walnuts or a generous portion of aromatic Cretan honey – another precious commodity in the ancient (and modern) world. Traditional Greek yogurt is made from sheep's or goat's milk, and it's thick like ricotta cheese. The natural milk fat (also known as the flavor) is not extracted. I wish we had stuff like this in the States – why they extract all the fat from yogurt is beyond me – it's tasteless gelatin. People always seem to read the

nutritional information on the back of a yogurt carton – something obviously nutritious, but don't dare glance at the info on a bag of potato chips. Yogurt is pretty easy to make at home with cow's milk – that is, if you're not too busy. I have yet to hear of a case where someone gained weight from eating too much yogurt with 10% fat.

Cheese is another favorite here and there are many different types (mostly sheep or goats' milk, but some made from cows' milk). The list is long and requires a separate chapter but homemade variations of feta, mizithra (a soft fresh cheese, sometimes similar in texture to New York style cheesecake or ricotta depending on the cheese maker), kasseri and kefalotiri (hard cheeses similar to Romano) still rule as part of the meal. Snacks may include fresh or dried fruits like figs, apricots, raisins and nuts like peanuts, walnuts, almonds and delicious roasted chestnuts. Last but not least are the beloved olives – large or small, green, purple or black, preserved in brine or not – take your pick, they're everywhere.

Wine is a given – but generally consumed in moderation and always with food – not as heavily as we've witnessed in the plate-breaking tourist spots or Hollywood productions. If everyone here lived like Alexis Zorbas, we'd be in trouble. Some men drink quite a bit of raki, the local firewater distilled from grape must, which can be hit or miss depending on the producers. Quite a few raki fans around here are well over 80 years of age – I'm not sure how healthy they are but they're certainly living long! It's OK to drink a little too much and dance a little bit, but to get a rip-roaring sloppy drunk is not acceptable behavior (this observation is based on local rules of conduct, tourists noticeably exempt). Also, Greek women drink very little alcoholic beverages, if at all, and smoking is a new, scarcely tolerable vice of the younger generation. Good guess to say the women are healthier here.

### **Foraging For Food: Make A "Fresh" Start**

So, how do we put this all together on the dinner table and live to be 100? Think of a time when there was no section in your supermarket with food crammed into boxes, bags or cans – YOUR DINNER made in a big building on the edge of town -- preparation conditions unknown without submitting a Freedom of Information Act Request. This is the price we pay for convenience in our hectic, industrialized world.

Now picture the farmers' market with produce harvested at peak ripeness that day, fresh fish straight off the boat, fresh meats straight from the hills (the chickens and sheep share the olive groves – roaming not to Hoboken, New Jersey) and fresh breads still warm from the oven. Picture a nice trip to the country to pick up your wild greens (and snails if you like), wine, olives, olive oil and cheese from local



producers. This is rural Crete. This way of life is not enticing to the younger generation – I can understand why – farming is a tough life.

There are supermarkets where you can buy many good-quality items – and even imports if you want them, but everyone here knows the difference between manufactured and home-grown quality and they'd rather be sure of the source.

Besides, the price is often better without the middleman. I'm sure people live like this in many regions of the world, but I'm in Crete and will not speculate or make comparisons of places I've never been. It's not Manhattan and if everyone moves here – it will soon resemble Manhattan – making the point moot. We are not doomed to live short, unhealthy lives just because we can't live here. We have a choice – to wean ourselves off the manufactured stuff to control the content of the foods we eat. In short, to make a “fresh start” and shift back to raw ingredients. How do farmers the world over plan their meals? The conversation goes something like this: “Honey, what's ready to pick today?”

### **Cooking Techniques**

The Cretan diet is based more on technique than recipes. Grilling is the number one choice here – we're back to some ancient basics. When considering the nutritional benefits, picture this: meat set above fire, fat dripping to the ground (or to the bottom of your fancy gas grill). In the case of grilled fish – it's brushed with olive oil and grilled whole – tastes great. Grilling is easy and requires minimal attention or pots and pans, that's why I like it. For those of us who don't enjoy grilling during a winter blizzard, there's roasting. Mastering these two cooking techniques can make life much easier. All you need to know is when the food is done. No fancy recipes or sauces are required -- olive oil, lemon and your favorite herbs are great on anything that's prepared well – fish, chicken, steaks, burgers, lamb chops, vegetables, whatever. Keep it simple.

During the cooler season, Cretans braise meats along with a variety of vegetables, starches or beans. Braising does require a bit of time and attention, but stews taste better made in advance and often freeze well, so it's good for snowed-in days. Cretans also make a number of fish soups – which are very subtle and delectable – just a variety of bite-sized morsels simmered in fish stock with onions, potatoes, carrots and a bit of parsley – sometimes with tomatoes. That's it, nothing to it.

As for the preparation of vegetables, there are a few standards here and most are seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice or vinegar and salt (sometimes pepper, herbs and spices on certain vegetables). I don't know what Greeks did without tomatoes – a rather recent addition from the new world -- because you see them with almost everything. Aside from eating them fresh with nearly every meal during the long growing season, they make a basic tomato sauce (personal preference) and combine it with dried beans and vegetables like string beans, zucchini and potatoes, artichoke hearts or broad beans. It's a thin sauce, which acts as a flavorful cooking liquid –

retaining all the vitamins – and great for dipping your bread. If you just boil vegetables and drain the juice – guess where the vitamins are going.

Another common way to cook vegetables like cauliflower, artichoke hearts, stuffed cabbage or vine leaves is to simmer them in a little stock or water and make a frothy egg-lemon sauce (avgolemono) with the vegetable liquid. For greens like spinach or beet shoots, they are often simmered in a little water until tender, served in a bowl with their cooking juices and seasoned at the table with, you guessed it, lemon, olive oil and salt. Greens are also sautéed in olive oil (what else?), sometimes with garlic, leeks or onions and served with a splash of lemon juice or used as the base for a variety of delectable vegetable pies (chortapitas). Try any combination of greens commonly available at the supermarket like kale, collards, beet greens or spinach using the same technique – bearing in mind that some greens are more delicate and require less cooking time, so add them later on in the process.

Tomatoes, bell peppers, zucchini and eggplant are often stuffed with seasoned rice with or without ground meats and baked or layered in casseroles with meat sauce and bechamél sauce on top (i.e., moussaka). These complicated dishes are usually reserved for special occasions. Learning cooking techniques as opposed to following recipes opens up a whole new world of experimentation and makes cooking more fun when you know there's a basic formula to which you then add your imagination. Enough ideas for now?

**Great, let's eat!**

## Maintaining the Mediterranean's Heritage

*Nikki discusses the benefits of eco-agritourism (aka responsible or sustainable travel) as a way for rural communities to help preserve their distinctive cultural and natural heritage. Over the past decade, Nikki has supported the efforts of over 40 small businesses and individuals working on action programs to preserve Crete's heritage. Rose formed a network of organic farmers, artisan producers, chefs, lodge owners, historians, nature conservationists and many other residents to collaborate on a range of dynamic educational programs. By rekindling resident and visitor interest in culture and nature, eco-agritourism can simultaneously help sustain communities, encourage expansion of organic agriculture and provide an extraordinary visitor experience.*

### Introduction

Crete is blessed with fascinating history spanning over four thousand years, natural beauty and an abundance of healthy food choices, both wild and cultivated. There is much to discover and enjoy. There is also much to protect. Beyond the seaside resorts and imposing limestone cliffs are people preserving their heritage: sustainable organic farmers, artisan bread bakers, cheese makers, beekeepers, chefs and many others. They are maintaining what most of us have lost touch with: A connection between their community and nature. Their knowledge of sustainable living practices is beneficial to the global community. Many people around the world are striving to "return to the land," while many people in rural Crete have never left the land. But modern society beckons and rural communities are abandoned or developed.



### Implementing Responsible Travel in the Case of Eco-Agritourism

The fact that a destination has excellent cuisine and nature reserves does not mean that communities are able to open up the area to visitors. Before residents invite visitors to their villages and farms, they need to consider how they will present and sustain their programs and protect their communities.

Since most of us are not farmers, we don't know what to expect from an agritourism experience. Agritourism is meant to support farmers and their communities. In the case of organic agriculture, it also helps to protect our environment. Agritourism can make a difference as part of the bigger picture of preservation and responsible travel. Organic

farming is a lifelong commitment, not a 9 to 5 position. Supplying the world with excellent food and wine is more challenging than we might ever know or appreciate. While it's a lovely notion if farmers or fishers could take the day off to entertain us, we are asking for the world. The time they devote to sharing their knowledge with us is a rare privilege.

Responsible travel covers a lot of ground today. There are interrelated categories – eco, sustainable, ethical, green, geo, etc. The bottom line is that people are actively working to support and protect the communities in which they live, work or visit. Responsible travel is part of the solution to a growing number of global issues relating to social inequality, exploitation, cultural preservation, food safety and environmental protection. It's a fine theory, embraced the world over, yet the practice is challenging. While the number of responsible travel practitioners increases, the number of travellers partaking in such beneficial programs is minimal. Many people say they prefer “real” or “ethical” travel experiences, yet they are unaware that local communities must justly benefit from the services they provide.

It is the responsible travel practitioner's job to develop valuable programs and create awareness of that value, which will be offered at a fair price. Preservation work is a partnership between providers and beneficiaries. Enjoying an action-packed series of cultural activities requires the participation of many local people. It must be financially rewarding, otherwise the arrangement is not mutually beneficial or ethical.

### **Results: Sharing the Benefits of Responsible Travel**

By tailoring small-group seminars in harmony with the seasons, cultural and environmental impacts, availability of residents and interests of attendees, CCS has the advantage of flexibility. In consideration of our collective and individual projects, CCS seminars serve a dual purpose: To support local preservation work and share those benefits with visitors. We link organic farmers with other members of the community through: 1) our educational programs; 2) staying in locally-owned lodges and ecolodges; 3) providing free training and referral services; 4) global promotion of projects; and 5) sharing seminar revenues (in contrast with standard tourism practices). Many travellers benefit from community-based preservation work. We stress that communities must benefit the most if we expect to enjoy such services, including excellent fresh, local organic cuisine. CCS acts as a gateway for communities to expand or create their own programs.

There are established Women's Agricultural Cooperatives in Crete, producing and selling traditional products within their communities or beyond, depending on their resources and support for their work. There are also excellent home cooks, gardeners and artisan producers that do not have the resources to join cooperatives or host visitors. CCS invites residents from varied backgrounds to participate in our programs. By collaborating with the community, eco-agritourism stretches beyond the boundaries of

a single farm. Communities maintain their way of life as they choose, rather than altering it to suit an outsider's vision of foreign travel.

Eco-agritourism must be advantageous for communities. Otherwise, there is no incentive to provide these valuable services or expand organic production. Our approach can be implemented anywhere in the world. Eco-agritourism is a business run by accomplished professionals. All beneficiaries – the public and private sectors, the media and travellers need be aware of the value of these programs. CCS is an internationally acclaimed responsible travel program. We also organize workshops for colleagues and our success has encouraged others to follow our lead.

### **Promoting Responsible Travel**

As with all market trends, travel providers offering alternative forms of tourism in an unethical manner is damaging to bona fide programs. As long as the majority of media and travel agencies instil the message that "cheap travel deals are the way of the world," people will not be aware of the true cost of travel, including the environmental



and social impact that travel has on communities or the true cost of safe food. The majority of travel agencies are not yet trained in ethical travel practices. It requires that they modify their business practices and form mutually beneficial partnerships with local communities. More travellers are asking agencies questions such as, "How does your company contribute to the well being of local people and their environment?"

While responsible travel options are increasing, practitioners are competing with volume discount travel and powerful PR campaigns that overshadow their distinctive work. Mass media rarely covers small-scale programs because there is no apparent benefit to them. Discount deals cut in mega travel cannot be cut in rural communities. Most media outlets expect free food and lodging, consultancy and entertainment. Small-scale practitioners cannot afford this form of advertising, nor are they certain to benefit from it, as the coverage is rarely specific to their work and could be subjective.

The first step to launch a small-scale program is from the ground up in collaboration with other local businesses, advocacy groups and public agencies, if possible. With the rapid growth of responsible travel advocacy groups, the number of entrepreneurs participating in programs is increasing. Responsible travel is not a trend; it is a necessity.

### **Conclusion**

Responsible travel, in the case of eco-agritourism, provides a wide range of benefits to communities and visitors. It provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs and travellers to be active participants in sustainable development programs. It requires direct collaboration with preservationists and tangible returns on their investments.

Responsible travel can help preserve our world's sanctuaries and even reverse some damage caused by unsustainable development. It can build meaningful careers for future generations and protect the very reason why people visit countries like Greece – to discover her significant cultural legacy and natural beauty.

### **About Nikki's Sustainably-focused CCS Network**

Tourism and agriculture are primary industries in Crete. CCS promotes the benefits of educational travel via the window of traditional foodways. The majority of tourism planners support generic services such as large beach resorts and continental food. Most operations are of little benefit to local communities in terms of providing financial stability or protecting Crete's cultural and natural heritage. Over 70% of Crete's residents are still involved in agriculture; primarily olive oil and wine production on a part-time basis. Both industries compete for increasingly scarce natural resources, commonly referred to as "the war on water."

As agriculture is an integral part of Crete's culture, our programs centre around the work of organic farmers and interrelated preservation work to serve several purposes at once. Industrial agriculture in Crete is comprised of cooperatives, some of which represent hundreds of families cultivating a variety of produce on small plots of land. Slowly, some cooperatives and individuals are converting to organic production. Yet, they face challenges if their neighbours are growing conventionally and public entities are not supporting their work. A growing number of specialized organic farmers are implementing projects. Most producers have incorporated agritourism into their work to promote their products, share their knowledge and generate supplemental income. Not all producers or stakeholders are collaborating with residents involved in interrelated preservation work that can enhance the quality of agritourism and the quality of life for residents.

### **References**

Adams, B. (2008): The New Agritourism

Blangy, S. (2006): Le Guide Des Destinations Indigenes

Kyriakopoulos, V. (2007): Lonely Planet Guidebook to Crete

Miller, D. (2008): The Jungle Effect

World Tourism Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development (2006): Case Study, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries: [www.desti-nations.net/cases/plonearticle.2007-10-31.0051745210](http://www.desti-nations.net/cases/plonearticle.2007-10-31.0051745210)

National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations:

[www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable)

Transitions Abroad, Responsible Travel Handbook (2006):

[www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/travel/responsible/responsible\\_travel\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/listings/travel/responsible/responsible_travel_handbook.pdf)

## Eat like a Cretan

**Too busy to cook?** Me too. And I'm definitely too busy to conduct a research study on the effects of cooking fats attached to scary scientific acronyms. It takes all the fun out of eating when I have to consider whether DKZ prevents BXI from developing into EEEK. Maybe I should start providing nutritional information to my dinner guests with a disclaimer: "Diner Beware! The delicious meal you are about to consume contains trace amounts of an illicit fat called butter – eat at your own risk!"

Yes, fat tastes good, that's why we love it. Fat is also a necessary component in our diet within that dreary "moderation" context. We hear we should be careful about almost everything we eat these days – but last year, such-and-such was great for us -- this year it's lethal. There's conflicting information as some comes from reputable sources while others are product promotions. What, prey tell, do you plan to eat with that healthy ketchup? I appreciate the efforts made by the scientific community to decipher what's best for us to eat, but when I'm really hungry, stand away from the refrigerator!

**Old habits die hard** and we need real options that taste good. When we get home from a long day at work, do we plan a meal centered on good acronyms or good food? The fact that certain foods are not direct from Mother Nature or as pure we think is a problem we must address, often at a great expense. It's a pity we have to pay big money for a "natural" tomato or a chicken that was allowed to live like a chicken, roaming around Disneyland.

If the price of sustainably farmed organic food is the real price of food, as farmers have told us a million times, then I'm glad to pay it if I can afford to. With subsidies for industrial farming squeezing out quality small-scale producers, and the frightening condition of our waterways from agricultural and industrial pollution, then it's up to us, the consumers, to come up with ways to implement change now.

If "organic" supermarkets were not so fancy and overpriced, the scales between what sustainable organic farmers are making and what THE markets are raking in might be livable for all of us – and the planet. Every person deserves access to clean, safe food and farmers markets are generally out of bounds for most of us both in price and location. We've got to find ways to directly support our local farmers or we'll be victims to the big chains and their mystery meat forever. [See "Culture Shock" on this website.]

But good nutrition along with plenty of exercise equates to good health, which is the most important thing in life – right? I'd rather follow my own moderation method because I don't believe that strawberry "flavored" stuff in a can is healthy or that a diet by numbers (at 7:30 a.m. eat ½ of this and 2 slices of that with black coffee – or no coffee, heaven forbid) is living. What's so bad about yogurt with 10% fat and coffee

with a bleeping teaspoon of real milk?

**The Mediterranean Diet that originated in Crete** proved that olive oil is the No. 1 good fat and a contributing factor to immortality. The bad news is that olive oil is not a magic potion you can splash over salami and call it a healthy day, nor can you drink it before digging into ravioli with cream sauce (yum) in the hopes that it will miraculously counteract the EEEK factor. Realistically, people living far from quaint farming villages with fresh air and minimal pollution cannot replicate the lifestyle or certain recipes of the people of Crete. However, city dwellers can get a little creative with what they have on hand and prepare good food without too much trouble or expense. Olive oil is not a horrible substitute for butter, in fact, it is far more versatile in cooking and seasoning a variety of foods.

Here's a few tips on the lifelong moderation method or to eat like a Cretan ("ELC"): The first step is to lay off the manufactured stuff -- dinner in a cardboard box prepared with love in some warehouse on the edge of town, or anything that looks like laboratory food. Many fruits and "rinse and eat variety" 30 seconds or less to busy cooks. Display fruit place like the dinner desk, not for decoration, that, it's a matter of ingredients and healthy cooking roasting.



vegetables are of the or REV, and require prepare. Good news for in a prominent table and your office but to eat. After incorporating other ELC mastering their top two techniques --grilling and

**When grocery shopping, go to the produce stand first.** Stock up on your favorite fruits and vegetables with the idea of eating them all day. Guilt-free nibbling. Start with REV's. You may be surprised at how quickly you fill your basket with great stuff -- apples, pears, plums, nectarines, berries, celery, radishes and greens. Move on to the peel and/or slice and eat items -- oranges, bananas, melons, tomatoes, avocado, peppers, cucumbers and cabbage. Select vegetables you can just bake or steam -- potatoes, artichokes, cauliflower, broccoli, asparagus, and spinach. Most of these options also taste good cold, so make double for later use or bring to work.

**OAS:** Plan to season all your vegetables with olive oil, acid (vinegar or fresh lemon juice and sometimes other citrus fruits, depending on your imagination), and seasonings, including lots of fresh herbs like parsley, basil, dill, oregano, sage, thyme or rosemary. Most herbs are packed with vitamins and vibrant flavors. I dare not bring up the overused antioxidant and medicinal usage lingo, but in many cases, it's a proven fact. FRESH herbs are good for you and they can proudly replace other "bad"

seasonings like salt. This combination is hereinafter referred to as "OAS."

How about a nice platter of sliced tomatoes and red onions sprinkled with black olives, basil and OAS? Delicious and beautiful. Think of the colors and textures of a plate of sliced cucumber, avocado and radishes. Nothing to it. There's no need to make a fancy salad dressing, a splash of OAS is perfect. Complete the ELC picture with crusty whole grain bread if possible.

Get to know the people working in your grocery stores, no matter how big the place is. Ask for preparation advice, where the fish and meats are from and how they define "fresh" and "organic." Who knows more about cooking fish than the fishmonger? A chat with the experts can be fun. Get tips on selecting produce, storage and shelf-life. If you have children, bring them along for the tour, it's a way of introducing them to unfamiliar foods – your own subtle form of marketing. Connect with the people who provide the foods you eat.

They say that frozen vegetables retain high vitamin content because they are picked when ripe and immediately frozen. Terrific if it's true. Not all vegetables freeze well and

the listed serving sizes are small for ELC standards, like a pound of frozen spinach serves 4 people – make that 1.5. Frozen vegetables are easy to store and cook and you can often find items that are rarely available fresh, like sweet corn or petite peas and legumes like baby limas and black-eyed peas. Mix all four together (cooking time varies, so just steam in stages), then add a little chopped onion, red bell pepper or tomato and OAS -- tastes great hot or cold.

Of course, we must treat ourselves to something nice during the daily grind, but vending machines (or kiosks) rarely offer anything delicious or worth the calories. Fast-food salad bars look great but the horror stories about sanitation is a great appetite suppressant. All of those strangers handling the utensils and throwing them back into the food should be scary enough. Besides, the price for a little lettuce and tomatoes is highway robbery.

It's worth it to bring your own food to work. If there's a fridge and kitchen, bring and store as much as you can each week like juices, yogurt, fruits, nuts, REV's and a jar of OAS. Make easy, hearty salads with the office stash and items from last night's dinner -- sliced chicken, steamed fish, potatoes and vegetables. Take the time to venture out for a nice long walk and pick up some fresh bread because you're worth it. A back-up plan would be whole-grain dried bread or crackers. Also, have on hand a block of good cheese, moderation not starvation is the motto, and slice a bit to accompany your meal because you need some fat in your diet – fat that tastes good!

### **Here's "the list" or cheat sheet for ingredients in Crete:**

- Cultivated Vegetables -- Tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, artichokes, potatoes, onions, leeks, scallions, garlic, cabbage, celery, beets, sweet and hot peppers
- Cultivated Herbs - parsley, dill, mint
- Wild Vegetables – artichokes, dandelion greens, purslane, nettle
- Wild Herbs (for cooking and teas) – oregano, thyme, sage, chamomile, mint, dyctamus, fennel
- Fruit – figs, apricots, pomegranate, pears, apples, oranges, melons, cherries, grapes, lots of lemons
- Dried Fruit – figs, apricots, raisins
- Legumes -- lentils, chickpeas, broad beans, fava, yellow split peas
- Nuts -- chestnuts, almonds, walnuts, pine nuts and peanuts
- Fresh Seafood – dozens of fish varieties including sole, smelts and sardines, and plenty of octopus, mussels, calamari
- Grains – rice, barley, whole wheat
- Bread – lots of homemade, whole grain bread!
- Goat's milk and sheep's milk yogurt and cheeses (the big difference here is they graze on wild plants in the mountains, so the milk is very herbal and earthy)
- Poultry and eggs...yes, they are free to roam to the next village
- Homemade wine – in moderation, of course
- Homemade spirits produced from grape skins (raki) – in moderation for sure
- Wild game -- quail, hare
- Lamb, goat, pork and sausage
- Beverages are fresh citrus juices, wild herb teas, wine and raki.

### **Simple, seasonal everyday favorites are:**

- Salads –can be a simple bowl of sliced cabbage with olive oil and vinegar or a plate of sliced tomato and cucumber
- Marinated red peppers or beets
- Simply grilled fish or meat finished with a splash of olive oil and lemon juice
- Braised greens with a splash of olive oil and lemon juice
- Zucchini, potato, tomato and onion stew
- Stews with fish and vegetables, meat and vegetables, beans and vegetables
- Add a little hunk of cheese to any of the above, some bread and olives and you're set for a snack or a grand dinner

**There's so much more, but this will get you going for now. What is missing from this diet is equally important.**

- Beef and dairy products. Although they are imported from the mainland, they are still a rarity on the dinner table. Ice cream is the one thing people spring for. Crete is rocky and mountainous and not fit for cattle, so there are very few cows and anything produced by them here.
- Processed and junk food (“factory food”). The people who enjoy the traditional Cretan diet wouldn't touch a frozen dinner or a bag of chips.
- Processed beverages (“laboratory drinks”). Soft drink companies have really infiltrated the Greek market, but again, people who follow the traditional diet have no interest in this artificially flavored stuff.

### **The bottom line?**

If your food is fresh, clean and has flavor, it's easy to enjoy it! Steer clear of all manufactured food and make simple, healthy meals. You'll certainly feel better and hopefully live a long and happy life. With all of the information we now have about the benefits of the Cretan diet, these are easy steps to make the time to live it!

## The Mediterranean Diet Greek Style

### Roasted Beets

Serves six as an appetizer

Roasted beets retain so much more flavor, texture and color than boiled beets. You can also use different colored beets to add flare to the dish.

1-2 bunches of beets (allow 2 or 3 medium size beets per person)

1 small red onion, sliced

2 garlic cloves, sliced

1/8 cup olive oil for cooking (plus 2 Tablespoons for marinade)

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar (plus a dash for marinade)

salt & pepper

1. Preheat oven 375F
2. Remove beet greens and reserve for horta later (see recipe below). Rinse and scrub debris from beet roots and drain.
3. In a large heavy baking pan, add all of the ingredients and toss to coat. Cover the dish tightly with foil and roast until tender (about 1 hour). Remove from oven to cool.
4. Peel beets and slice into quarters.

To serve as a warm side dish: Briefly sauté beets in a little olive oil with a splash of vinegar, salt and pepper. As a cold meze: Just coat with olive oil and vinegar and eat! They also add life, texture and color to green salads.

## Horta

Ta xópta, literally translated, is wild greens or green vegetables.

Horta grows wild in the hillsides and is still hand-picked by villagers. It's a medley of edible wild greens, simply braised in a little water and seasoned with olive oil, lemon, salt & pepper. It's usually served cold or at room temperature. The combination depends on the season and availability. Horta can be used as a variation for spinach pie, which is rustic and delicious. Save the cooking liquid, which contains the golden vitamins. The juice can also be added to vegetable drinks or soup stock. For the purpose of availability outside of Greece, and preferred cooking techniques, the following theory is recommended.

Allow at least ½ pound of raw greens per person (arugula, black mustard, dandelion or beet greens, curly endive, sorrel, spinach, kale or collards). Certain greens require longer cooking time, so add them to the pot in stages. For instance, simmer kale and collards until tender, then add arugula during the last 10 minutes of cooking time. A good rule of thumb is the tougher the raw greens, the longer the cooking time. Add salt or acid (lemon or vinegar) when you're ready to serve because they can turn bright green vegetables brown. Use stainless steel or any other non-reactive cookware.

General guidelines for six servings

4 pounds of raw greens  
1/2 cup olive oil  
2 small gloves garlic, finely chopped  
3 leeks (white part only) cleaned and sliced  
1/2 fresh parsley, chopped  
1/8 cup fresh dill, chopped (optional)  
1 lemon, juiced  
salt and pepper to taste

Rinse greens thoroughly and remove tough stems. A water saving-technique is to fill a clean sink or basin with 6 inches of fresh cold water, add trimmed greens, and submerge a bit to allow sand to fall to the bottom of the sink. Transfer greens in small quantities to a colander and rinse again. We have a saying in cooking school "How many times should you rinse the spinach? Until it's clean!"

Technique:

1. In a large heavy stock pot over medium-high heat, add olive oil and heat for 30 seconds.
2. Add leeks and sauté until tender. Add minced garlic and sauté 30 seconds more (browned garlic will turn bitter).

3. Add greens that take the longest to cook (kale, collards) and simmer until tender (about 15 minutes), stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon.
4. Add more delicate greens like arugula or spinach along with the fresh herbs and simmer just until wilted.
5. Serve in a bowl with a little cooking juice, splash of lemon and olive oil, salt and pepper to taste. To serve as a side dish, drain with a slotted spoon and add the flavorings at the last minute.

## Stuffed Grape Leaves (dolmadakia)

Makes about 40 filled leaves

1 jar of vine leaves (approximately 40)

### For the filling:

1/8 cup olive oil

1 cup scallions, finely chopped

3/4 cup medium grain rice

½ cup pine nuts

¼ cup parsley, finely chopped

1/8 cup dill, finely chopped

¼ cup seedless currants, soaked in 1 cup white wine

### For the stock:

1 lemon, juiced

1 cup dry white wine

3 cups vegetable or chicken stock

¼ olive oil

salt & pepper

1. Vine leaves are soaked in brine and need to be rinsed before using. They also tear easily, so handle with care. Rinse the leaves in batches in a stockpot of boiling water, drain. Remove stems and line up on your work surface, shiny side down.
2. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, sauté scallions in olive oil until lightly browned.
3. Add rice and pine nuts and sauté 2-3 minutes more to coat.
4. Add herbs and currants with wine, salt and pepper.
5. Lower heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes, remove from heat to cool.

To fill the leaves:

1. Place 1 teaspoon of the rice mixture in the center of each leaf and fold the base up over the filling. Fold in each side and roll up into a secure cylinder.
2. In a non-reactive stock pot, ideally with a removable colander, arrange the grape leaves seam side down in neat layers so that they stay secure during simmering.
3. Add the stock ingredients, cover with a plate to keep them in place, and simmer gently over low heat for about an hour, until tender.
4. Remove, drain and arrange on a platter to cool (or refrigerate until ready to use). Garnish with lemon wedges and dill sprigs or edible flowers. Can be stored in the refrigerator for up to one week.

## Lima or Fava Bean Plaki

This is a standard Greek formula for making seasonal vegetable stews. A rich tomato sauce acts as simmering liquid for anything from chick peas and artichokes to zucchini and potatoes. Several different types of beans work well with this recipe. Frozen beans can also be used.

1 pound large white lima beans

1 large onion, diced

4 garlic cloves, minced

2 celery stalks, diced

2 carrots, diced

4 tomatoes, diced

1 lemon, juiced

½ cup olive oil

4 cups chicken or vegetable stock

1/2 cup fresh parsley, chopped

1/8 cup fresh dill, chopped

salt & pepper to taste

1. Soak the lima beans in water overnight, drain, rinse and add fresh water to cover.
2. Parboil for about 30 minutes, drain and return to the stock pot and reserve.
3. In a large sauté pan over medium heat, add the olive oil and sauté onions until golden brown. Add garlic, carrots, celery and sauté 5 minutes more.
4. Combine the above to the stockpot of beans, along with the tomatoes, lemon, olive oil and stock.
5. Simmer for about an hour or until tender and the stock is reduced to a light sauce.
6. Add the fresh herbs and spices and simmer for 15 minutes more.
7. Serve hot as a side dish, or cold along with other salads, or at room temperature as a snack with bread. Keeps for one week under refrigeration.

Note: This recipe can also be used for fresh green beans with the following modifications:

Start with step 3 using a large stock pot. Add the fresh beans and the remaining ingredients, with only one cup of stock instead of four. Simmer for ½ hour or less, depending on preference.

Serving suggestions are the same.

## Tzatziki (Yogurt and Cucumber Sauce)

Serves 6-10 as a side dish or appetizer

Tzatziki can be enjoyed with a simple slice of pita bread or as a dip for fresh vegetables. It is also a refreshing sauce for grilled vegetables, fish, lamb or chicken. It's versatile and very low in calories.

32 ounces plain yogurt (organic, made with sheep's or goat's milk if available)  
3 cucumbers, peeled, seeded and grated (or finely diced, if you prefer a chunky sauce)  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
½ cup scallions, minced  
2 Tablespoons fresh parsley, finely chopped  
4 Tablespoons fresh dill, finely chopped  
3 Tablespoons olive oil  
1-2 Tablespoons white wine vinegar  
Salt & Pepper to taste

Greek yogurt is considerably thicker than commercially produced brands in the States. Drain some of the liquid to produce the best results. Cucumbers might also be drained for the same reason.

1. If your yogurt is thin and watery: Line a large, fine-mesh sieve with cheesecloth and place over a deep bowl with a 2-inch clearance to drain the yogurt. Place the yogurt in the center of the sieve, cover the top and refrigerate overnight to drain (or at least two hours).
2. Place the grated cucumbers in sieve over a bowl, add a little salt, cover, refrigerate to drain for a few hours.
3. Combine all of the ingredients together and refrigerate until ready to serve. Garnish with the herbs used for the dip or cucumber slices and black olives. Best made one day in advance. Will keep for one week under refrigeration.

## About Nikki Rose

Nikki Rose, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Founder and Director, is a Greek-American professional chef and writer. She is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and has worked in fine dining establishments and cultural-culinary education in Paris, San Francisco, New York and Washington, DC. She explored Greece for over 10 years before settling down in her grandmother's homeland of Crete in 1998 to form Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries.

Nikki has designed and hosted distinctive culinary arts preservation seminars since 1996, featuring chefs from The White House, The Culinary Institute of America, Johnson & Wales, the International School of Confectionery Arts, Grand Rapids Community College, the Belgian Embassy in Washington, DC, The Ritz-Carlton, and premier restaurants. Her programs are approved by the American Culinary Federation for Continuing Education credits and have been professionally videotaped for educational purposes.

Nikki was assistant cookbook editor at the Culinary Institute of America, working on professional and commercial cookbooks. She contributed to "Thirty Secrets of the World's Healthiest Cuisines" (John Wiley & Sons). Her published articles, upcoming book and documentary focus on traditional cuisine, culture, sustainable agriculture and environmental issues. Articles have appeared in Slow Food, Athens News, Responsible Travel.com, Sustainable Travel International, the Center for the Advancement of Foodservice Education, Greek Circle Magazine, and Stigmes (Crete) Magazine, among many others. CCS worked with Television New Zealand on their culinary travel series "Taste Takes Off."