

Food & drink

Top 10 restaurants on the Greek Islands Chefs' recommendations **Plus** DIY Greek recipes



Greece

Mezze forte

Rachel Howard seeks out the country's most authentic and scenic places to eat, from beachside tables where you can feast on just-caught fish to designer establishments with Med-fusion menus



Café society in Little Venice, Mykonos

1 Thalassaki, Isteria beach, Tinos This unassuming taverna on far-flung Isteria Bay has an amazingly inventive menu. Owners Antonia and Aris spend each winter experimenting with new flavours. This summer, their nouvelle Cycladic specialities include *xerolithia* (terrine of marinated, char-grilled vegetables drizzled in a tomato and raisin reduction), local goat's cheese with garlic and poppy seeds, and mussels in saffron and celery sauce. 00 30 22 830

31366. Open daily April–Oct, lunch and dinner. Dinner about €40 for two without wine

2 Etrusco, Kato Korakiana, Corfu Greek gourmets make pilgrimages to the inland village of Kato Korakiana to pay homage to Hector Botrini's innovative spin on Ionian cuisine. Daring combinations such as prawns in an egg noodle crust with creamed lettuce and smoked caviar, or grouper in bean coulis

garnished with flowers from Corfu are delicious. Botrini's own prosciutto and smoked swordfish is outstanding, and his wife Monica's desserts are superb. Try the delectable green-tea-and-vodka ice cream. Service is equally accomplished, a rarity in rural Greece, and the dreamy courtyard is draped in bougainvillea. Book in advance. 00 30 26 610 93342. Open April–Oct, dinner only. Dinner about €80 for two without wine

3 Mavrikos, Lindos, Rhodes Brothers Dimitris and Michalis Mavrikos are the third generation to run this award-winning restaurant with a star-studded clientele. The views from the pretty, whitewashed terrace are magical enough to distract from the tour buses wheezing past. Sophisticated dishes include sautéed calamari in saffron-and-beetroot sauce, cracked wheat with minced octopus and nutmeg, and skate and pine nut salad. Knock back some home-made limoncello then indulge at the Mavrikos' Geloblu ice-cream parlour nearby. 00 30 22 440 31232. Open April–Oct, lunch and dinner. Dinner about €60 for two without wine

4 Kiki's, Agios Sostis, Mykonos This local institution is simplicity itself. There's no sign and no phone. Just follow the bronzed bohemians trailing onto the tree-shaded terrace overlooking Agios Sostis beach, lured by the aroma of char-grilled pork chops (tenderised in a marinade). Barbecued meat and seafood are accompanied by rustic-chic salads such as artichokes with Parmesan in lemon-mustard vinaigrette, served on artfully mismatched crockery, and ➤

THE REAL GREEK RECOMMENDS Chef Theodore Kyriakou, who regularly visits Greece to source ingredients for his London restaurant, The Real Greek, shares his favourite Hellenic flavours

● Plomari on Lesbos is the ouzo capital of Greece – and the world! This is where one of my favourite ouzos, Barbayiannis, comes from. Or try Giannatsi, a less well known brand distilled using the traditional method. The food to have with ouzo is salted sardines, caught that morning, salted on the boat,

and served the same night, skins removed and seasoned with oil and lemon. The best sardines come from the bay of Kalloni. In July and August, they are the perfect size. In August, there's a sardine festival. The Captain's Table in Molyvos is perhaps the most romantic place to eat on the island.



● On 15 August, the biggest feast on the island of Astypalea takes place at Panayia

tou Kastrou. The *pougia* (cheese pies with honey) are really tasty. Also try *arntista*, lentils with rubbed dough, and rice pilaf with sour cherries. ● Pserimos has one of the most memorable beaches in Greece – a turquoise bay of shallow, warm water. You could almost be in the Palauan islands. Tavernas line the

beach, with good, basic, local flavours. ● On 14 September there's dancing, food and wine at the 'celebration of the cross' in Grikos on Patmos. Try the *dolmadakia* (tiny vine leaves stuffed with rice, goat meat, raisins, lemon and herbs) and traditional sweets made of dough, almonds and

walnuts, topped with syrup. ● Join in the olive harvest between September and late October at the Rovies cooperative on Evia. There's a guesthouse, Eleonas, with very good food. You can go for great walks in the olive grove.' *The Real Greek*, 14–15 Hoxton Market, London N1 (020 7739 8212)

PHOTOGRAPH: JASON LOWE FROM 'THE REAL GREEK AT HOME' (MITCHELL BEAZLEY); STATON WINTER/POLARIS/EVINE



A spread of courgettes, langoustines and octopus at Milos, Athens

SPILIADIS SPILLS THE BEANS

Costas Spiliadis's celebrated **Milos restaurants** (in Montreal, New York and Athens) show off the finest Greek ingredients. Whenever he can, Spiliadis escapes to his summer house on **Kythira**. 'Potamos has a bazaar every Sunday morning where local farmers sell their products. Look for the purest thyme honey in the world, mountain tea, and *tsipouro* (a local liqueur).' His favourite local haunts? **Manolis in Diakofti** for *kakavia* (fish soup); **Paulina**, a pretty garden in Logothetianika village, for baby pork chops; and **Filio** for traditional recipes such as *tiganopsomo* (deep-fried cheesy pancake),

aubergine with *ksinohondro* (cracked wheat), and free-range rooster with *hilopites* (egg noodles).' If he's heading further afield, Spiliadis recommends 'any of the **ouzeri in Aigina's fish market** for grilled, sun-dried octopus, and *garidaki*, a tiny local variety of shrimp. Pick up some pistachios while you're there.' On **Santorini**, he heads straight to **Giorgaros** for 'the best grilled fish, *domatokeftedes* (tomato fritters), and fava ever.'

Milos, Hilton Athens, 46 Vassilissis Sofias Avenue (00 30 210 724 4416). Open for lunch and dinner

➤ followed by devilish chocolate brownies. Gorgeous waitresses and a cosmopolitan crowd add to the charm. *No phone. Open April–mid-Oct, 1pm–7pm. Lunch about €45 for two without wine*

5 Pandelis, Marathi, Crete

The ultimate castaway cove, Marathi is a strip of golden sand with a taverna at either end. Make a beeline for Pandelis, where Greek-Australians Toula and Manolis welcome you into an enchanted garden. It was once cultivated with fava and vineyards, but now the site merely nourishes souls with its delicious tranquillity. The food at Pandelis is all home-made, from the brown bread to the syrupy walnut cake. Try the octopus with caper leaves, courgette croquettes or goat roasted on a wood fire. Rent one of the simple rooms

and you can also feast on jams, farm-fresh eggs and fruit shakes for breakfast. *00 30 22 470 32609. Open May–Oct, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Dinner about €30 for two without wine*

6 Makellos, Pitious, Chios

Boisterous locals congregate under the 600-year-old plane trees in this village in the hinterland of Chios to feast on the Mathrianos family's hearty home-made noodles, *kopanistopitta* (spicy cheese pie), *poulouda* (stuffed courgette blossoms) and goat stew. Guests are greeted with a shot of *souma* (fig-based firewater) and pickled garlic, and treated to quince in syrup for dessert. *00 30 22 720 23364. Open daily 15 June–20 Sept, lunch and dinner (Fri–Sun rest of year). Dinner about €20 for two without wine*

7 Balouhanas, Perama, Lesbos

There's always a lively local scene at this family-run taverna on a wooden deck suspended above the bay of Yera. *Balouhanas* is local slang for a fish market; besides delicious home-grown salads and home-made cheeses, there's an extraordinary array of marine *mezze*. Octopus fritters and salted sardines are best savoured with a miniature bottle from the extensive ouzo menu. *00 30 22 510 51948. Open daily, year round, lunch and dinner. Dinner about €40 for two without wine*

8 Chryssi Akti, Nimborio, Evia

Posh Athenians zip over from the mainland by speedboat to this no-frills fish taverna at the end of a dirt track. The dish of the day is whatever the Tollias ➤



Susan and Benetos Matthaiou on Patmos. Above, typical Greek salad



lemon crème brulée, courtesy of Benetos Matthaiou, who began his career as a cook in the Greek army. After a stint in Miami, Benetos set up shop at this restored farmhouse, where salads are picked from the organic garden. The menu is Med-Asian, the jazz is mellow and the staff gracious. A shot of *sgropino* (lemon sorbet with vodka), is the perfect palate-cleanser.

00 30 22 470 33089. Open 1 June–mid-Oct, 7.30pm–midnight. Closed Mon. Dinner about €50 for two without wine

➤ brothers happen to catch in their nets that morning, drizzled with divine *ladolemono* (olive oil and lemon). In summer, they might knock up a crab salad, lobster spaghetti or mussel pilaf as you watch the sun set over the Aegean and sift sand between your toes. 00 30 22 240 51207. Open year round, noon to 11pm. Dinner about €40 for two without wine

9 Benetos, Sapsila, Patmos

The fashionable through the flower-filled veranda of this romantic waterfront restaurant. Valentino, Carolina Herrera, and Richard Gere have all sampled the wasabi tuna, fava with fresh figs, and

Benetos's fava with fresh figs

- Sift 500g of fava to remove any stones or grit.
- Boil the fava with a chopped onion for 30–40 minutes. The cooking time will vary – they should be soft but with a little bite. Use a wooden spoon to scoop off any foam produced in the cooking.
- Blend to a smooth purée with a hand-held mixer. Add a generous splash of your finest olive oil, salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon.
- Garnish with sliced fresh figs.

10 Tarsanas, Spetses

Wedged between the brightly coloured fishing boats of the Palio Limani (Old Harbour), Tarsanas is a family-run fish taverna that manages to be both upmarket and unpretentious. Smiling, efficient waiters bring bruschetta, pickles and sardines, a tempting prelude to delicious lemony fish soup, red mullet ceviche, white tarama, rocket and lettuce salad with grated *manouri* cheese, and whole grilled calamari. Hugely popular with Athenian weekenders, so book in high season.

00 30 22 980 74490. Open daily 1 April–1 Oct, weekends only the rest of the year. Dinner about €60 for two without wine

GOURMET GIFTS Stella Chanioti of Athenian deli-café Bakaliko Ola Ta Kala, which stocks delicacies from all over Greece, gives her recommendations on what to take home

Santorini: Fava and capers marinated with their leaves, which make a good garnish. The Santo Cooperative makes great sauces from the island's cherry tomatoes.

Lesbos: Look out for Ouzo Pitsiladi, one of the rarest

brands. Delicious with *ladotyri*, a hard, peppery cheese preserved in oil, or pickled aubergines. Mytilinio, extra virgin oil with 0-1% acidity, is made from Kolovi and Adrambiani olives, cultivated exclusively on Lesbos for 4,000 years.

Chios Mastiha, or mastic (a spice), appears in many guises. The Mastiha Shop (also at Athens airport) has an excellent range of beautifully packaged mastic-based products. Also stock up on *soumada*, *mandarinada* and *vyssinada* –

almond, tangerine and sour cherry cordial.

Corfu Nouboulo, spicy, air-dried pork with pepper, the cured pork native to Mykonos and Tinos. *Bakaliko Ola Ta Kala, Platia Eleftherias, Glyfada* (00 30 21 089 44577)