



Salmon cubism with citrus fruit and green apple sorbet at Entrusco

TASTE OF THE Greek Islands

Volcanic soils, full-flavoured produce and exquisite seafood create an unforgettable culinary experience in the Greek Islands, whether you choose a simple meal at a local taverna or a chic Santorini rooftop haunt, writes Marissa Tejada



Prawn-butter cooked sea bass, fish roe mousse, baby shrimp and samphire salad at Bill & Coo



Pan-seared Angus beef fillet, calf tongue and sweet potato soufflé at Santoro



Santorini

UNCOMPLICATED BUT SOPHISTICATED, Greek island cuisine balances flavours from the sun-soaked Mediterranean earth and warm seas. Local food culture melds that relationship, where an emphasis on health benefits adds an incredible dimension to dining experiences that maintain the love of good company and the community of ancient Greek feasts. Each island chain, fiercely proud of their local dishes, retains select influences from ancient Greek, Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish ruling periods. A variation of flavours results, submerging with what is grown naturally, and creating a taste unique to Greek cuisine.

A clink of small tumblers brimming with a locally made spirit, be it *ouzo* or *raki*, accompanied by the toast “*stin yeia mas*” (to our health), sets a meal in motion. A communal meze of small warm or cold savoury plates is also shared: plump olives, tangy vegetable dips, cuts of salted fish or cooked octopus drenched in rich olive oil.

Throughout the islands, kitchen windows funnel out the inviting smell of freshly baked *pites* (savory pies). Each regional recipe results in a crispy filo dough exterior enclosing a full-flavoured filling: soft white cheese, spiced chicken or beef, or vegetable medleys of spinach or leek. The islands’ boiled salads are also an aromatic staple, the wild greens collected from hills and fields ranging from sweet, tart or bitter. Meanwhile, the country’s best wine varieties hail from Santorini where volcanic soil nurtures the main grape variety Assyrtiko, a vine that thrives on a water source of nocturnal dew and sea mist.

Though simple, main dishes are never plain. Fragrant slow-cooked rabbit, goat or lamb stews also bring out the essence of intensely flavoured fruit and vegetables, which are accustomed to blazing sun and meagre rainfall, such as cherry tomatoes, capers, cucumbers, eggplants and beans.

Above all, seafood remains king. At the countless sea-facing fish *tavernas* across the region, octopus are pinned out to dry, wafting above mounds of calamari, sea urchins and shellfish chilling on ice trays. Whether hand-painted fishing boats haul in catches of sea bream or sea bass, simple grilling with a standard mix of olive oil and a fragrant use of herbs such as oregano or thyme complete the most basic of meals. Once served, a

simple satisfying squeeze from a fresh lemon slice sings the tastes as one.

From sea or farm to table, meals in the sun-drenched Greek isles are a way of life, and the modern dining scene clings proudly to its gastronomic roots with dishes that creatively enhance what comes naturally from the sea and soil, meals that are lingered over, and the everyday views relished.



The Greek Islands' best 5

Five places to experience an authentic taste of the Greek Islands



1800 RESTAURANT

Perfectly balanced on the northern tip of crescent-shaped Santorini, Oia village spreads out as part of the whitewashed crest of clifftop homes and churches. One elegant mansion, built by a wealthy ship owner in the 19th century is home to 1800 Restaurant, one of the most notable gourmet tables in the Greek islands. Dining spaces are a combination of plush period furniture and a breezy terrace offering a perfect panorama of the island's sunken volcano. The menu brings out the best of traditional Greek dishes served with original touches, such as the classic grilled Greek lamb chops, paired with a sweet-and-sour green applesauce, and the fillet of fresh white grouper served with Santorini's famed sun-dried tomatoes, a mousse of olives and caper, honey parfait with pollen and sweet dough.

Oia, Santorini; +30 22860 71485; www.oia-1800.com



SANTORO

The island dining experience at Santoro, the restaurant at the luxury boutique hotel Grace, starts with a view that stretches out beyond the rooftop sparkling infinity pool to Santorini's natural wonders: Skaros rock and the famed sea-sunken caldera. In a breezy open-air environment, Santoro is a leading example of Mediterranean Greek fusion. Dishes are inspired by chef Spyros Agious' worldwide travels as well as his appreciation for the distinctive cooking in Greek island villages and the rich local products of the volcanic isle. The spectacular local wine list, carefully paired with Agious' choice dishes, also shows off what the land has to offer. The Assyrtiko Wild Ferment from Gaia Estate boasts elegant oak notes that matches with the smokiness of a seared octopus with deep-fried polenta and lime truffle honey dressing. Santoro's romantic Champagne Lounge Bar is equally sought after for its savoury menu of appetisers, champagne tastings and moonlit cocktails.

Imerovigli, Santorini; +30 22860 21300; www.santorini-grace.com



ETRUSCO

A famed Italian-Corfiot family discovered the incredible potential of their gastronomic heritage by defining creative Greek and Corfu-inspired cuisine, featuring touches of contemporary molecular gastronomy. Etrusco requires an off-the-beaten-path journey on the Ionian island to a small village where fine dining in a breezy, antique courtyard promises to make up for the ride. Chef-owner Ettore Bottrini starts off with appetisers worthy of a meal on their own: sea urchin soup, salmon cubes with green apple sorbet and a finely cut octopus carpaccio. Dishes are also creatively influenced from a range of Mediterranean cuisines – with surprises – as Bottrini balances eclectic ingredients from around the globe including a Peruvian bitter cocoa powder, which flavours an incredible shrimp risotto.

Kato Korakiana, Corfu; +30 2661093342; www.entrusco.gr



BILL & COO

For a seductive taste of the Cycladic islands, Bill & Coo delivers with a jet set ambiance and eclectic plates. The modern, minimal design of Mykonos' premier, luxury boutique hotel, Bill & Coo Suites & Lounge, frames a dining experience set around a sparkling pool and a clear view of the Aegean Sea. Chef Athinagoras Kostakos is behind the Mediterranean-inspired menu, which marries fine contemporary cooking techniques with ingredients native to Mykonos. Each dish is well thought out to bring out the savoury identity of olives, capers, citrus, fresh seafood and local vegetables. The Sea and Land of Mykonos starter features artichokes escabeche, grilled octopus, black-eyed beans, blood orange, lime and virgin olive oil. Signature dishes are also a delightful sea and land journey, including the rack of lamb with potato gnocchi, sweetbread tempura and a crunchy *kokoretsi* (lamb organs cooked on a skewer over hot coals), and the red mullet savore with tomatoes compote, onion, rosemary and local vinegar.

Megali Ammos, Mykonos; +30 22890 26292; www.bill-coo-hotel.com



OLD MILL

An ancient mill that once churned steadily on Greece's largest and most fertile island is the famously ambient and charming centrepiece of the Elounda Mare resort's premier gourmet restaurant, Old Mill. Flanked by fragrant gardens overlooking the sea, the dining area is a tranquil setting for fine Cretan cuisine – a combination that has earned it multiple Toque d'Or awards over the past 30 years, defining it as one of the best restaurants in Greece. Chef Antonis Petrelis believes in Cretan gastronomy's "timeless character," often fusing it with other Mediterranean influences but always sourcing organic ingredients from local farms across the island. Starters are tasteful and include Cretan wholemeal pasta with rooster and Anthotyros, Cretan cheese. Main dishes show off the diversity of Cretan gastronomy including a sea bass tartare marinated with lime and virgin olive oil with *salicornia* (sea beans), Cretan *crostini*, pearls of salmon and sea-urchin roe. Also classic is the rack of lamb in *keskeki*, a mouseline of lamb, wheat and herbs and yoghurt sauce.

Elounda Mare Hotel, Crete; +30 2841068200; www.eloundamare.com