

A slice of the Med

Though we might forget it sometimes, food should be much more than simply a meal: just ask any Greek or Cypriot.

Whether it's a meze plate filled with tasty nibbles, a kebab from a street food stall or a sit-down, Mediterranean dinner, eating represents an opportunity to gather with family and friends, gossip about the day's

events – and relish every morsel.

A holiday is the perfect time to indulge, and for the growing number of travellers looking to 'live like a local', eating authentic and delicious cuisine is an integral part of sampling the culture.


In Greece and Cyprus, food is not only intrinsic to the heritage and tradition but is also a subject of immense national pride, and

food-loving clients will jump at the chance to taste everything from crumbly feta and creamy hummus to succulent kebabs and sticky baklava.

Whether your clients are looking for street-level, local-led tours to scout out the freshest, tastiest produce, are hoping to get stuck in themselves and cook alongside local chefs,

or want to spend a day tasting wine and dining in traditional restaurants, here we pick out the most mouthwatering foodie experiences.

STREET EATS

The beating heart of the Greek and Cypriot food scene lies on the streets, where busy markets teem with pungent herbs, 

A foodie trip will satisfy every taste, writes Aby Dunsby

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TOP TIP
Trafalgar's Best of Greece tour includes a Be My Guest dinner with a local family on an olive farm

→ cheeses, meats and fresh fruit, and where local specialities fill the stalls.

For an insider experience that's more tangible than a guidebook, it's worth taking a foodie tour, whether as part of an escorted tour or by tagging a food-focused excursion on to a holiday booking. It will often take clients away from the tourist throngs to the top hidden spots, with a local leader offering plenty of first-hand knowledge along the way.

In Greece, the street food scene is strongest in Thessaloniki and Athens. Tony Carne, general manager of Urban Adventures, which offers street food tours in both cities, says: "There's much more to Greek food than feta, olives and moussaka. Clients can start the day with a real Greek coffee with the locals, visit the best open-air markets and taste some meze with ouzo or tsipouro in old-world ouzeris and small tavernas." Urban Adventures' four-hour Tastes of Thessaloniki tour starts from £31.

In Athens, street food tours often revolve around the Central Market, where clients can sample local pastries



Start the day with a real Greek coffee with the locals, then visit the best open-air markets for some meze with ouzo



and Greek staples such as feta and olives, and chat to stall owners about their wares. Do Something Different offers a small-group Taste of Athens tour (£48), while TravelCube's Food Safari tour allows the added novelty of discovering the market by electric scooter (from £50).

▶ A VINE TIME

If it's wine they're interested in, a wine tour will allow enthusiasts to learn about local varieties and traditional winemaking methods – and get to taste some of the good stuff too.

Culinary Backstreets' Greek Wine's Rebirth tour celebrates Greece as an up-and-coming wine-producing region and allows clients to sample 10 wines alongside local cheeses and snacks.

For a small island, Cyprus produces a lot of wine – 2.5 million litres a year – and has a long tradition stretching back 6,000 years. The Cyprus Tourism Organisation publishes a dedicated booklet outlining seven wine routes around the island, which can steer clients to vineyards and wineries everywhere from the Akamas peninsula in the northwest to the fertile valleys and winemaking villages south of the Troodos mountains.

There's also a wine museum in Limassol that clients can visit as part of a day trip with Viator, alongside a pit stop in the village of Omodos to see ancient wine presses and taste local wines (from £48).

▶ COOK UP A STORM

For a hands-on foodie experience, learning how to cook a traditional



ABOVE:
Thessaloniki

ABOVE RIGHT:
Athens wine tour

LEFT:
Greek pastry



Paradisos Hills Hotel in Lysos, Paphos region, offers seven nights' B&B from €693 until November 15, commissionable at 20%, not including flights. paradisoshills.com

Cyplon offers a seven-night stay at The Westin Resort, Costa Navarino, from £1,299 including free half-board, private transfers, flights from Gatwick with pre-booked seats and luggage, departing September 6. cyplon.co.uk

Planet Holidays offers a week's all-inclusive at the five-star Aldemar Knossos Royal in Crete from £872, including the new Greek Street Food experience and flights from Luton on June 8. planet-holidays.co.uk

➔ dish alongside a local chef enables clients to absorb the sights, smells and secrets of Greek and Cypriot cuisine, and then wow friends back home with their new recipes.

Suggest a hotel that offers its own cookery classes to those seeking maximum convenience. At Costa Navarino in Greek mainland region Messinia, clients can learn proper home cooking with an evening making traditional pasta and Greek salads in a historic stone cottage (€60).

Over in Crete, Aldemar Resorts offers Saturday cooking lessons extolling the health benefits of Cretan cuisine, and Daios Cove has cookery classes for adults and kids. They include a children's meze cookery class added this year, which will encourage fussy little eaters to have a taste of local olives, cheese and tomatoes while learning how these ingredients go together in traditional Greek dishes.

At Domes of Elounda, clients seeking a change of scene can opt for a day excursion to the village of Krista to learn how traditional pastries are put together, before making some for themselves.

Operator Islands of Greece

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In Crete, seasonal activities include herb collecting, raki distilling and orange picking

can also arrange traditional Cretan cooking classes as well as seasonal activities including herb collecting, raki distilling and orange picking at its various properties around Vamos in Crete.

Cooking traditions are equally strong in Cyprus, where chefs at Paradisos Hills, a quiet property in northwestern village Lysos, can teach clients how to make a three-course Cypriot meal before tasting the fruits of their labour (from £110).

Guests hoping to escape the confines of their hotel can also look to various local operators and restaurants for cookery classes. At family-run restaurant Lengo Tavern in Paphos, chef Petros Mavros runs cookery classes for groups of between two and 10, while Our House in



LEFT:
Walking
tour in
Greece

BELOW:
Baking
lesson
at Costa
Navarino

Vavla, halfway between Limassol and Larnaca, gives lessons alongside activities such as seasonal foraging.

▶ COME DINE WITH ME

The best culinary experiences don't necessarily take place around the dining table, and

Greece and Cyprus come bursting with options for those craving something unique.

Both Costa Navarino and Domes of Elounda celebrate the Mediterranean aspect of Greece's cuisine with olive oil tastings. The former offers clients the chance to join in olive harvesting, ➔



PICTURES: ISLANDS OF GREECE; THESSALONIKI TOURISM ASSOCIATION



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ASK THE EXPERT



Photis Lambrianides,
commercial director,
Olympic Holidays:

“For dining in a picture-postcard setting in Cyprus, there’s Kalamies restaurant. The sea, sand and white furniture make this feel like the quintessential beach bar, though Kalamies takes its food seriously, especially the sea bass and swordfish.”

RIGHT: Olive harvesting, Costa Navarino

FAR RIGHT: Amathus Beach Hotel, Cyprus



➔ depending on the season, or a tasting any time of year (€25), while the latter offers a tour of the nearby Vassilakis Estate and its olive press.

At Grecotel Hotels & Resorts, you can even live like a farmer for the day on Agreco Farm, a

working farm owned by the hotel group. Guests can get stuck in to milking the cows, shearing the sheep or collecting eggs laid by the chickens, before heading to the kitchen to help prepare snacks including Cretan cheese pies and fresh bread.

Those who prefer eating to cooking are spoiled for choice too, with plenty of hotels offering memorable dining experiences.

At Aldemar Resorts, guests can visit the snack and beach bars to try the new menu of Greek street food, brought in this year, reinvented by its chefs but still served the laid-back way in paper cones.

At the luxury end of the scale, Ikos Olivia’s menu at open-air restaurant Ouzo is the creation of Michelin-starred chef Lefteris Lazarou, with dishes including courgette fritters served with yogurt, and grilled octopus with broad beans. And Costa Navarino added gourmet restaurant Perovino in April, with dishes developed by Italian Michelin-starred chef Andrea Fusco.

▶ EATING OUT

Like an increasing number of all-inclusive hotels and resorts, Ikos Olivia and sister resort Ikos Oceania offer guests the option to dine out at a local taverna, allowing them to soak up the atmosphere of the area and support the local economy.

“Many top hotels are now

offering dine-around facilities, with a dinner supplement payable if the guest is booked on bed and breakfast arrangements or if the restaurant chosen is gourmet,” says Olympic Holidays commercial director Photis Lambrianides.

For those clients staying in a hotel on an all-inclusive basis, the dine-around option is usually part of the package. Hotels offering a dine-around option include the Four Seasons Hotel in Limassol, where guests can dine at various restaurants including Amathus Beach Hotel’s fish and grill restaurants, and at Capo Bay Hotel in Protaras.

Even if a foodie excursion is not part of a pre-booked package, it’s worth encouraging clients to head out from their hotel. The region of Larnaca is running its free winter activities again this year, from November 1 until April 30, 2017. Typical culinary activities will include a day in Athienou, where clients can make halloumi, visit a restored flour mill and try traditional kleftiko dishes at one of the village’s taverns.

In Crete, clients can celebrate the end of their holiday with a traditional evening in the small mountain village of Kato Karouzanos with a home-cooked meal, plenty of wine, and Cretan music and dancing in local costume (from £35 with Attraction World).

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