



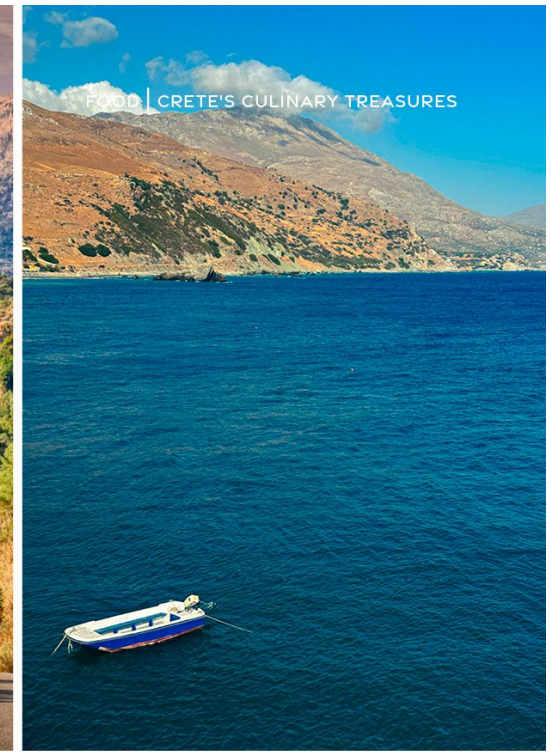
FOOD | CRETE'S CULINARY TREASURES

CRETE'S CULINARY TREASURE HUNT



EXPLORING LOCAL PRODUCTS

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Have you ever wondered what lies beyond the scenic beauty of Crete, where sandy beaches embrace rugged mountain peaks? As the largest island in Greece, Crete offers a blend of history, culture, nature, and gastronomy that creates a complete experience for anyone who visits!

In this article, we will explore and discover more about the Cretan culture, local products, and gastronomy that make this Mediterranean island a captivating and delicious destination for tourists, and food enthusiasts. Due to its gastronomy, traditions and lifestyle, Crete is often considered unofficially a "Blue Zone," a designation for regions of the world known for their longevity and healthy lifestyles.

Crete has a rich history that is showcased through its archaeological sites and monuments scattered throughout the island. The most famous Palace of Minoan Crete, Knossos, is one of the most significant archaeological attractions in Greece. The island's diverse history, apart from the Minoan, includes influences from Mycenaean, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman cultures. The history of the island has influenced Cretan culture and how locals live. Cretans are known as extremely friendly and welcoming to everyone, they invite and treat visitors like friends, and they always open their homes.

Apart from the island's culture, Cretan gastronomy and local products are known worldwide and are the greatest pleasures of the island. Cretan cuisine is renowned for its authentic recipes with the use of local ingredients that are handed down from generation to generation. In this article, we will focus on Cretan products, which we will divide into three main categories.

1. In the first category of the culinary treasures of Crete, we are highlighting the famous "dakos," the main ingredient of the dakos salad. Dakos is a local bread with a unique taste and flavor. It is crafted from fresh bread left to sun-dry and has a dense texture. It is usually served with olive oil (to soften the dakos), tomatoes, feta cheese, and dried herbs such as capers.

In the same category, we should also mention variety of pasta that Crete offers. "Skioufichta" pasta, which looks like the Italian casarecce, is thin pasta sheets and is usually served with chicken, beef stew, and different pasta sauces. "Kriitharaki" known as orzo, is pasta, with a small, flat, and slightly elongated shape, and is usually served with meat or chicken dishes. "Hylopites" are fresh pasta sheets that are mixed with tasty sauces, cheeses, different meats, and chicken. It is also used in soups.



2. In the second category, we are focusing on Cretan honey and Cretan cheeses. Cretan honey is considered among the purest one in the world, a real treat. The bees of the island collect nectar from the fragrant wildflowers, which gives the honey its unique color and special scent. The gold liquid nectar has a very sweet taste and a one-of-a-kind golden color.

Cheese is a very important ingredient in local cooking and is well-known for its great taste and top quality. One of the favorites is "Xinomizithra," which has a special scent and is creamy. It is used as an alternative to feta cheese in the Greek Salad, and it gives a different taste to it. "Graviera Kritis," is also another popular Cretan cheese, which offers a nutty and slightly sweet taste. It is used in pasta, usually grated or enjoyed on its own, making it a must ingredient in Cretan cuisine. There are other cheeses that are also worth trying, these are *anthotyro*, *ladotyri* and *pichtogalo Chanion*.

3. In the third category of Cretan gastronomy, we explore the different drinks and herbs of Crete. "Tsikoudia" is a strong liquor made locally by Cretans. It is usually consumed in small shot glasses and has a special taste and smell.

Tsikoudia is enjoyed usually after dinner as an *apéritif*, and when people get together, along with small plates. Another

essential part of life in Crete is their local wine. On the island, a wide variety of grapes is grown, resulting in high quality wine.

Local refreshments like fuzzy drinks are sourced from different parts of Crete. Each small village and area usually produces their own cola, orange soda and other carbonated soft drinks. The base of the sodas, which is water, comes from local sources.

Local herbs are also a big part of Cretan cooking. They have strong and nice smells that make the food taste good. These herbs also have a special role in medicine, and they assist the digestive and immune system.

This article couldn't be complete without the Cretan olive oil. Cretans have been producing olive oil for centuries now, and it is a big part of their heritage and history. Cretan olive oil is not only enjoyed locally, but also exported internationally. From salads to traditional dishes and even some desserts, Cretan olive oil is the most important ingredient in every kitchen!

Crete is more than just an island; one can find an incredible collection of nature, food, culture and history. Cretans craft their food with love and *meraki*, creating unforgettable memories for anyone who visits. ✦