

CRETE: EXPERIENCE THE GASTRONOMIC MAGIC OF SIMPLICITY



EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY

CRETE CANDIDATE 2026





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Dear friends,

The proposal for Crete's inclusion and declaration as a "European Region of Gastronomy 2026", spearheaded by the Educational Development Company PLOIGOS in collaboration and with the support of the Region of Crete, significantly contributes to advancing the Region's efforts in establishing a robust network of relations and collaboration among local government, university and research institutions, development agencies, Cretan entrepreneurship, the production sector, the educational and cultural sector, and the local community.

This initiative primarily targets the aforementioned entities, along with other initiatives or movements constituting the "Cretan Dietary Ecosystem". It invites them in an organised and effective way to convey, contribute, co-decide, and ultimately operate collectively, forming a cohesive structure, when necessary, to uphold the "Cretan Dietary Culture".

Through our involvement in this international initiative, we aim to enhance the visibility of Cretan gastronomy and foster Crete's connection with the European Gastronomic Regions, with the shared objective of developing partnerships and joint initiatives centred on leveraging gastronomic traditions and their intersection with tourism, production, art, and culture.

Recognising the evolving global norms and attitudes towards environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, healthy eating, and local communities, we choose to participate in shaping responses, advocating to the international community the Cretan Diet as a realm embodying timeless and healthy values. These values are intended to be experienced by those seeking not only dietary guidance but also a holistic lifestyle capable of nurturing not only the body but also the spirit, through an enriching journey spanning from the Minoan era (the first organised European civilisation, 3000 BC - 1450 BC) to the present day. This journey is complemented by the scientifically documented health benefits of the Cretan Diet, as evidenced by seminal studies such as the Rockefeller Foundation's research (1948), the 7 Countries Study on heart disease and cancer (conducted by American researcher Ancel Keys in the 1960s), and the Lyon Heart Study (undertaken by French researchers Serge Renaud and Michel de Longereil in the 1990s).

Furthermore, we aspire to modernise this significant heritage into a contemporary tourism offering through the organisation of gastronomic tourism and corresponding itineraries. This can be achieved by concurrently safeguarding the Cretan gastronomic identity and utilising research and scientific findings generated by Cretan institutions for documentation purposes.

In this context, gastronomic tourism assumes a central role in comprehending, appreciating, and utilising the Cretan Diet as a conduit for conveying messages, as an ambassador of a culture rich in flavours and sensations, as a repository of knowledge, health, production methods, and techniques, and as a catalyst for local development, spotlighting Crete's identity through its people, products, and initiatives. Such tourism is primarily grounded in the sustainable practices of both large and small tourism enterprises, artisanal endeavours steeped in identity, and local social capital in terms of relationships, perceptions, partnerships, coexistence, and social cohesion. In essence, it prioritises visitors, the local community, and the locale, thereby countering the global trend towards uniformity. Ultimately, gastronomic tourism based on the Cretan diet can also contribute to promoting sustainable agriculture and gastronomy and, more broadly, addressing critical global environmental challenges.

This is the cause we are called upon to safeguard and develop, and our collaboration with both the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism and other Gastronomic Regions of Europe is an indispensable factor for achieving the goals we have set forth.

Stavros Arnaoutakis
The Regional Governor of Crete





Stop looking for the pill which substitutes for the Cretan diet.
There is no such thing

Serge Renaud, 1998
Lead researcher of the “Lyon Heart Study”



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AIMS



OBJECTIVES - AIMS OF THE CANDIDATURE AND LINK WITH IGCAT VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSES

OUR AIMS	IGCAT values, principles, and purposes
Encourage public and private stakeholders to unite around a shared project, which, due to its strong identity value, can motivate them to collaborate as a cohesive team towards a common objective.	→ Being part of an international platform and participating in its initiatives will serve as a powerful tool to showcase the Cretan identity, leverage strengths, and draw inspiration from the experiences of other regions.
Enhance the uniqueness of the Cretan diet and distinguish it from the Mediterranean diet.	→ Well-being and Healthier Living IGCAT advocates for the promotion of healthier lifestyles through greater awareness and citizen engagement in natural farming, outdoor recreation, and culinary and cultural traditions
Safeguard the heritage of Cretan gastronomic culture and transmit its legacy to future generations.	→ Education for the future The World Regions of Gastronomy prioritize collaboration with education and knowledge sectors. These collaborations are vital for the dissemination of information on the importance of regional gastronomy for the future health and well-being of citizens.
Promote the use of local products by tourism and catering establishments.	→ Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities Creativity in the form of storytelling and visuals can generate both new products and services. The widening of food markets poses unique opportunities for sustainable regional food systems.

Thereby enhancing the value of the products and stimulating interest among young people in agriculture.



Linking Urban and Rural

The World Regions of Gastronomy endeavour to re-connect rural and urban environments by bringing the countryside to the city and the city to the countryside, encouraging a re-valorisation of traditional and indigenous knowledge of food customs and systems.

Establish Crete as a year-round gastronomic destination, moving away from summer mass tourism towards more sustainable and high-quality tourism.



Implement pilot initiatives to reduce plastic consumption and promote separate waste collection.

Balanced and Sustainable Tourism

Raising awareness about the advantages of integrating local food, recipes and traditions into tourism offerings and collaborating with food and cultural events services in the region will contribute to greater environmental, economic and cultural sustainability. Visitors are the best ambassadors for a region thanks to social media and can increase the client base for food export.

Raise awareness among citizens about the importance of respecting the destination and foster responsible and socially and environmentally sustainable behaviour.



Feeding the planet

In support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, IGCAT's World Regions of Gastronomy aim to stimulate debate about the production of sufficient and healthy food for everyone.





PREAMBULE

Cretan gastronomy stands as a cultural treasure with roots extending back millennia. Its traditional dishes and unique ingredients mirror the island's rich history and its geographical position within the Mediterranean. Renowned for its health benefits, Cretan cuisine prioritises fresh, seasonal ingredients. Sustainability lies at its core, emphasising the use of local produce and the preservation of traditional methods. Within these pages, we aim to explore the history, traditions, heritage, sustainability, and health advantages of Cretan cuisine. Additionally, we'll delve into how to experience Cretan gastronomy through food tours and cooking classes, while contemplating the future of this culinary legacy.

Cretan cuisine is a testament to the island's biodiversity, cultural richness, and exceptional culinary mastery. Moreover, it has made significant contributions to the Mediterranean diet, serving as a model for healthy and sustainable eating practices that can inspire individuals and communities worldwide. More than just food, Cretan gastronomy represents a cultural heritage and a sustainable way of life worthy of celebration and preservation.



METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

In creating this book, as the lead Partner of the candidacy, the Pancretan Non-Profit Educational Development Company Ploigos, in collaboration with the Region of Crete, adopted a bottom-up approach. Thirty professionals from various scientific fields connected to gastronomy were interviewed over the course of a month, including university professors, chefs, writers, historians, entrepreneurs, and researchers. They all provided insights and materials in response to the project team's inquiries. The resulting dossier, shaped by their input, was shared with the community. Notably, even the recipes presented were selected through a voting process; each interviewee nominated three preferences, from which the recipes included in the bid book were chosen.

Cretan gastronomy boasts a rich and profound historical heritage dating back thousands of years, a testament to its strategic location in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Minoans, who thrived on the island from 3000 BC to 1450 BC, are renowned for their utilisation of olive oil, grains, legumes, honey, and wine, elements that continue to shape Cretan cuisine today. Over the centuries, Crete has served as a nexus of civilizations, absorbing diverse culinary influences and practices, resulting in a gastronomy that is both distinctive and exceptional. Forming part of the broader Mediterranean diet, Cretan cuisine is characterised by a plant-based, whole-food eating pattern abundant in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and olive oil. Furthermore, the Cretan diet exemplifies sustainability through the use of locally-sourced ingredients, seasonal produce, and traditional cooking methods. This essay will explore into the sustainable heritage of Cretan gastronomy and its contributions to the Mediterranean diet.

Firstly, Cretan cuisine embodies a culture of sustainability by prioritising locally-sourced ingredients and seasonal produce. The island's geography, with its fertile valleys and rugged mountains, yields a diverse array of crops, seafood, and meats. Sustainable agricultural practices have been integral to the Cretan diet, with farmers employing techniques passed down through generations, such as crop rotation, companion planting, and natural fertilisation methods. Additionally, the cuisine incorporates wild herbs, plants, and mushrooms, reflecting the Cretans' profound connection with their natural environment. The use of local and seasonal ingredients not only underscores a commitment to sustainability but also imbues the cuisine with distinctive flavours, rendering it truly unique and delicious.



02 CRETAN DIET AND HEALTH: THE “HEART” OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET



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There is no such thing.

Serge Renaud, 1998
Lead researcher of the “Lyon Heart Study”

The intricate interplay between genetic predisposition and environmental influences shapes an individual’s health, with diet emerging as a pivotal environmental factor that exerts continuous influence throughout one’s life. In this context, the island of Crete has been a focal point since 1948, when the Rockefeller Foundation responded to the post-war call by the Greek government to address the perceived “poor” living conditions of the Cretan population. The ensuing assessment, surprisingly, revealed a nutritionally adequate diet among Cretans, well-adapted to the natural and economic resources of the region. The spotlight on Cretan diet and health intensified with the ground-breaking Seven Countries Study initiated in the early 1960s by American researcher Ancel Keys. This landmark epidemiological study, spanning 25 years and involving 13,000 men across seven countries, aimed to unravel the relationship between diet and cardiovascular diseases. The study unequivocally highlighted Crete as a region with the best health conditions and the lowest mortality rates from heart disease and cancer compared to other populations.

Based on the results of the Seven Countries Study, among other factors, Ancel Keys coined the term “Mediterranean diet” to describe the dietary pattern followed by the people of the Mediterranean countries. Precisely because the results of the study highlight the Cretan Diet as the crown of longevity among the rest of the countries, it is considered the heart of the “Mediterranean Diet,” which made Greece famous in nutrition matters, leading experts around the world to turn their attention to the “Phenomenon of Crete” as it was called, thanks to the longevity of the island’s population. Subsequent research, such as the Lyon Heart Study by French researchers Serge Renaud and Michel de Longenil, underscored the therapeutic potential of a Cretan-style diet. Administering this diet to post-heart attack patients resulted in a significant reduction in mortality rates and cancer incidence, emphasizing the enduring impact of the Cretan Diet on health and well-being.

According to the world-renowned Professor of Preventive Medicine and Nutrition at the University of Crete, Mr. Antonios Kafatos: “The excellent health and longevity of the Cretans are attributed to their traditional diet. This diet is simple and includes mainly olive oil, which provided approximately one third of the daily energy per person.” While most of the energy came from cereals, mainly bread, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and rarely in small amounts from eggs, cheese, milk, fish, and a little red wine at each meal. The main characteristics of their diet were:

- the low consumption of saturated fat and red meat
- the high intake of monounsaturated fats (mainly through olive oil)
- its high content of antioxidants and vitamins.

BASIS OF THE CRETAN NUTRITION

- Extra virgin olive oil as the exclusive and main source of fat, covering 1/3 of the daily calories.
- Daily consumption of seasonal and local fruits, legumes, vegetables, endemic wild herbs and aromatic plants, unprocessed cereals, is the basis of the Cretan diet.
- Consumption of dairy products almost daily but in small to moderate amounts.
- Consumption of poultry and fish on a weekly basis in moderate quantities.
- Consumption of red meat only a few times a month.
- Moderate alcohol consumption, mainly red wine with meals.
- Eating fresh fruit as a daily dessert and traditional honey-based sweets a few times a week.

Seasonality and locality are also important aspects of the Cretan diet. As shown by the data of the studies carried out, the Cretans who participated generally consumed seasonal foods, little or no processing, which were products of the wider area where they lived, parameters that almost completely determined their dietary choices.

As can be seen from the above, scientific validation adds a level of credibility to the time-tested health benefits of the Cretan Diet. However, what is also important to emphasize is that these benefits do not arise only from the nutrition (raw materials, quota and frequency of consumption) but from the whole of the Cretan diet, i.e. the Cretan way of living. Cretan diet extends beyond the act of eating, embodying a holistic approach to life that integrates physical activity, socialization, and a unique cultural perspective on food. In Crete, meals transcend mere sustenance; they become occasions for companionship. This communal aspect of eating together reflects a cultural richness that permeates every facet of Cretan life. As we navigate the complexities of modern existence, the Cretan Diet beckons us to reconsider not only what we eat but how we live. It challenges the prevailing paradigm of isolated dietary interventions and invites a comprehensive re-evaluation of our relationship with food, community, and the environment. As we seek solutions to contemporary health challenges, the wisdom embedded in this ancient dietary tradition offers a timeless guide - one that transcends fads and quick fixes, urging us to embrace a holistic approach that nourishes.

In conclusion, the Cretan Diet offers numerous advantages:

- **Cardiovascular & Longevity:**
The monounsaturated fats from olive oil in the Cretan Diet benefit heart health and may extend lifespan through balanced, nutrient-dense eating. Regular consumption of fish, fruits, and vegetables also supports overall cardiovascular well-being.

- **Chronic Disease Defense:**
The emphasis on fresh produce, whole grains, and olive oil in the Cretan Diet lowers the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and neurodegenerative conditions. The diet's diverse antioxidants contribute to disease prevention.
- **Weight & Inflammation Management:**
High fibre and healthy fats in the Cretan Diet aid weight control, while omega-3s help reduce inflammation. Portion control, integral to the diet, promotes a balanced, anti-inflammatory lifestyle.
- **Holistic Health Approach:**
The Cretan Diet supports metabolic health, bone strength, and cognitive well-being. Antioxidant-rich nutrition protects against oxidative stress, and gut health is promoted, positively influencing digestion and immune function.
- **Balanced Nutrition:**
The macronutrient balance in the Cretan Diet—carbs from whole grains, proteins from lean sources, and healthy fats—addresses overall nutritional needs. Incorporating calcium-rich dairy and leafy greens further enhances bone health. The diet's omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants contribute to cognitive health, reducing the risk of age-related decline.
- **Cultural and Social Aspects:**
The Cretan Diet goes beyond food; it encompasses cultural and social elements. Meals are often shared with family and friends, contributing to a positive social environment that can influence overall well-being.

ARCHAEOLOGY & HISTORY



The culinary history of Crete is a captivating narrative, intricately woven into the fabric of the island’s societal and cultural tapestry. Dating back to around 7,000 BC, the introduction of the ‘Neolithic package’ by the island’s earliest settlers laid the groundwork for the agricultural practices that would sustain Crete’s economy for centuries. Remarkably, these settlers adeptly utilised the island’s diverse landscape, spanning from mountains to plains, to engage in farming, animal husbandry, and the cultivation of various crops and trees.

During the Minoan period (3000 BC -1450 BC), locally available ingredients formed the cornerstone of the diet. The Minoans cultivated a rich agricultural base, growing crops such as wheat, barley, and various cereals. Legumes such as lentils, grass pea, bitter vetch, and Celtic beans were also integral to their agricultural pursuits. Olive cultivation for oil production, along with grapevine cultivation for winemaking, flourished during this period. Honey, obtained through beekeeping, served as another essential sweetener, while herbs and spices added depth and flavour to their culinary creations. Fruits and nuts, including figs, pomegranates, grapes, and almonds, were not merely consumed on their own but were likely incorporated into a multitude of dishes, enhancing both flavour and nutritional value. Additionally, animal husbandry and fishing provided additional sources of protein, with sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, fish, and various mollusks featuring prominently in their diet. Overall, the Minoans had access to a diverse range of foodstuffs from both land and sea, which contributed to the richness and variety of their cuisine.

The historical periods (3rd-1st c. BC) underscore the vital role of agropastoral activities in sustaining local communities on Crete. Numerous Hellenistic treaties between Cretan cities highlighted the significance of these activities, regulating trade, grazing rights, and other aspects related to agriculture and animal husbandry. The exploitation of the island’s diverse landscapes, utilizing natural resources in farming, not only sustained local populations but also contributed to the region’s economic prosperity.

Food and beverages were not merely sustenance but also wielded considerable influence in shaping identities and asserting power in ancient Cretan societies. Feasts during the Minoan period and communal meals known as *syssitia* in later historical periods served as pivotal social events, where food acted as a symbol of community or even an expression of power and competition for authority. These gatherings, often held in large halls called “*andreaia*”, fostered social bonds and a sense of community. Mandatory participation in *syssitia*, coupled with contributions of agricultural or pastoral produce, promoted social cohesion and egalitarianism among citizens.

The medicinal aspects of Cretan cuisine, evident in recipes unearthed at sanctuaries such as the Asclepius one at Lebena, shed light on the local ingredients used for healing purposes. Cereals, legumes, olive oil, wine, honey, and indigenous herbs were not only consumed but also recognised for their medicinal properties, with some herbs

even being cultivated and exported to other regions, like Rome during the Imperial period. It is amazing how these ancient culinary practices and traditions have persisted and shaped not just the diet but also the cultural heritage of Crete. The knowledge and utilization of local ingredients for both sustenance and healing reveal a deep understanding of the environment and its resources.

The study of ancient Cretan diet and cuisine is indeed a multidisciplinary endeavor that draws from various fields. Archaeobotany plays a crucial role by analyzing plant remains preserved in different states to uncover details about what people ate, how they prepared food, stored it, and even how they managed their agricultural practices. Zooarchaeology, on the other hand, examines animal remains, both terrestrial and marine, to understand the role of animals in the ancient Cretan diet while osteoarcheology examines human bones to glean information on nutritional patterns. The application of organic residue analysis on vessels is another fascinating technique that reveals traces of what these vessels contained, whether it was wine, oil, fats, or other substances, providing direct evidence of what was consumed or stored. Written sources like the Linear B tablets and the inscriptions found across the island offer invaluable insights into the daily life, trade, and sometimes even specific food-related information of ancient Cretans. Additionally, the writings of ancient authors contribute to our understanding of the food culture and practices of that era. By combining all these disciplines and analyzing material culture, researchers can piece together a comprehensive picture of the ancient Cretan diet, shedding light on their culinary practices, agricultural techniques, and the overall way of life. This interdisciplinary approach helps reconstruct and understand aspects of the past that might otherwise remain hidden. These studies have been applied to several sites like Knossos, Cydonia, Palaikastro, Mochlos, Chryssi, Dreros and Azorias.

Katerina Moniaki, Archaeologist- Archaeobotanist

Today, Cretan gastronomy continues to evolve while remaining deeply rooted in tradition and history. Many establishments on the island offer traditional Cretan dishes made from locally sourced ingredients, supporting both the local economy and the sustainability of Cretan gastronomy for future generations. Cretan cuisine, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse influences, over the centuries (Minoans, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Venetians, Ottomans), is not only an integral part of the island's identity but also a cherished aspect of daily life, celebrated in religious festivals, social events, and family gatherings.

Autumn-winter dishes connected to a ritual cycle, called “polyspora” (multiseeds) are connected to the plowing and sowing of the land: Variations such as “polyspora” called “palikaria” including a mix of legumes and grains, and sweet “polyspora” including raisins, nuts, grains and fruits. A special version is a funeral ritual offering “koliva” made



Charred olive stones found at Kamara (modern Ayios Nikolaos) dated in the Roman period (1st c. B.C.-4th c. A.D.) (published in Moniaki 2020).



of wheat, sesame, powdered sugar, almonds, walnuts, raisins, pomegranate seeds, cinnamon, cloves and spearmint or parsley.

In addition to its association with religious events, Cretan cuisine is also an important part of daily life on the island. Family meals are a time for sharing traditional dishes and passing down recipes from generation to generation. Locals take pride in their culinary legacy and view cooking as a way to connect with their culture and traditions. Additionally, culinary tourism initiatives, such as tours and cooking classes, offer visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in Cretan culture, further promoting sustainability and supporting local businesses. The cultural heritage of Cretan gastronomy is an important part of the island's identity deeply ingrained in daily life playing an important role in social and cultural events.

Gastronomy transcends mere food and cooking techniques; it embodies a dynamic cultural phenomenon. Various factors such as the environment, nature, geography, climate, historical and cultural traditions, as well as social structures and relations (including gender roles and social stratification), collectively shape Cretan gastronomy over time. Like any intricate gastronomy, it has a central core from which a variety of branches and variations stem. Cretan gastronomy, being insular, exhibits both similarities and distinctions from other culinary systems, whether insular or continental, within the Greek region. Moreover, it holds a Mediterranean identity, intertwined with the culinary cultures of the broader Mediterranean area through historical exchanges facilitated by trade, migrations, and conquests.

Cretan cuisine is subject to a series of divisions that delineate distinct roles, including gender roles. A distinction can be drawn between domestic and public kitchens, where the former typically involves everyday cooking led by women, while the latter, being more informal, often emphasises the role of men. Nonetheless, variations may occur in both domestic and public

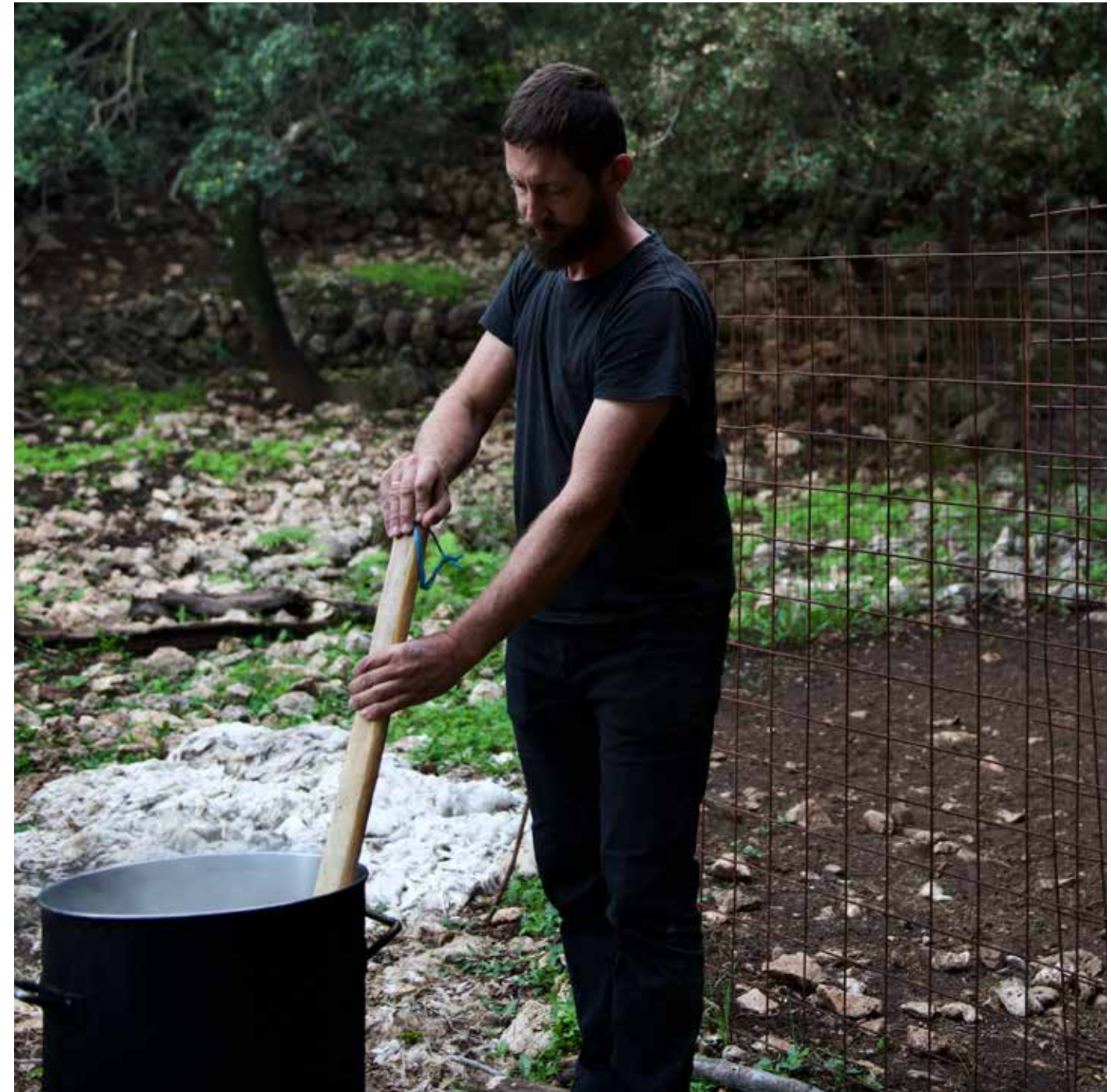


settings during festive, religious, or significant events. Gastronomy thus permeates the entire lifecycle, marking events such as birth, baptism, coming of age, marriage, and death, where symbolic combinations and differentiations are evident.

The unity of Cretan cuisine is forged through its diversity, influenced by the island's geomorphology and micro-local environments. These factors give rise to intriguing variations in Cretan cuisine, from Sitia to Chania, from coastal to inland areas, and from mountainous to plain regions, each with its own emphasis on agriculture or livestock. The contemporary notion of the Cretan diet, defining the culinary identity of the island, historically originated from the agricultural sector, when farming was the primary economic activity. Thus, Cretan cuisine evolved in close proximity to primary production (agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, foraging), immediate processing, and consumption, shaping dining practices accordingly. Its distinctive feature was its topophagic character, making it seasonal within the natural cycle of production, transformation, and consumption of products.

The aspect of Cretan gastronomy associated with rural areas yields a relatively simple yet varied cuisine, highlighting raw materials that can be consumed raw or cooked without elaborate culinary compositions. Conversely, urban Cretan gastronomy, while influenced by rural traditions, is more cosmopolitan, incorporating external culinary trends, some of which are reintroduced to rural areas. This integration of society, space, production, and consumption, with reference to nuclear families, extended family groups, and communities, fosters intergenerational cohesion in Cretan cuisine. Efforts are underway today to preserve or revive this cohesion despite disruptions to its traditional unity.

In terms of nutritional principles, Cretan cuisine relies on the Mediterranean trinity of grains/legumes, vines, and olives, which form staple components consistently present on the table. It also entails abundant consumption of wild greens, vegetables, and aromatic herbs, whether wild or cultivated. Ultimately, Cretan cuisine is shaped by diverse factors such as rural and urban contexts, seasonality, locality, religious and secular observances, fasting practices, and variations in consumption abundance and invention covering necessity.



OLIVE OIL & OLIVES

If the first three great secrets of Cretan gastronomy are the harmonious blend of produce used, the simplicity of the finest dishes and the ingenuity of the local people, the other great secret goes by the name of virgin olive oil: the main fat used in the traditional diet of the Cretans. Even their desserts are usually prepared with olive oil, rather than with butter. What's more, the entire island is effectively a vast olive grove, with 30-40 million trees.

According to official international statistical data, each Cretan consumes more than 35 litres of olive oil annually – more than any other population group. In Italy and Spain, the other main olive oil-producing Mediterranean countries, the average is just 10.5 litres!

When, in the late 1950s, American nutritionists came to Crete to examine the phenomenon of Cretans' longevity, they couldn't believe their eyes! 'How much oil they consume, my God,' exclaimed the internationally renowned doctor and pioneer in nutrition, Ancel Keys, as he saw the green salad drenched in an abundant amount of olive oil. Essentially, Keys reiterated what almost all explorers who showed interest in the daily lives of Cretans had noticed during the previous centuries. Today, it is believed that olive oil is the greatest secret of Cretan nutrition and Cretan longevity. Medical research conducted and ongoing in Europe and America reveals





that olive oil not only protects the heart but also helps the proper functioning of many organs and beneficially affects a wide range of diseases.

The quality of Cretan Olive Oil is known worldwide. Because it is not an industrial but a natural product that comes from a simple crushing of the olive, without extracts and enhancers. It is a product cultivated with care and passion and is packaged pure and natural by businesses that show their respect for both the product and the consumer. Olive oil was the main source of fat in the diet of Cretans. About 40% of the total calories consumed came from fat, mainly from olive oil.

Cretan oliviculture, the cultivation of olive trees, is a key aspect of agriculture on the island of Crete, Greece. Olive trees have been an integral part of Cretan culture, economy, and landscape for centuries. Cretan oliviculture represents a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, showcasing the island's commitment to sustainable agriculture and the preservation of its rich cultural heritage. The olive tree continues to be a symbol of life, peace, and prosperity on the island of Crete.

Olive cultivation on Crete has a rich history dating back to ancient times. The olive tree is considered sacred, and olive oil has been a staple in Cretan households for cooking, lighting lamps, and in religious rituals. Crete's Mediterranean climate, characterized by hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, is well-suited for olive cultivation. The island's terrain, with its hills and valleys, provides diverse microclimates that contribute to the cultivation of high-quality olives.

Crete is home to various olive varieties, each with its unique characteristics. Some notable varieties include Chondrolia, Tsounati and Koroneiki. The Koroneiki olive, in particular, is renowned for its high-quality oil and is one of the most widely cultivated varieties on the island. Traditional cultivation practices, often passed down through generations, involve terraced groves and low pruning to allow easier harvesting. Many olive groves are still maintained using traditional, manual methods.

Talking about the circular economy, olive products extend beyond oil. Cretans also use olives for table consumption, pickling them in various ways. Additionally, olive leaves are used for herbal teas, and olive wood is employed in traditional crafts.

The olive tree landscapes of Crete, with their silver-green leaves, contribute also to the island's scenic beauty. Olive groves cover vast areas of the island, creating a distinctive and iconic feature of the Cretan landscape.

CEREALS, LEGUMES, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Cereals, legumes, fruits, and vegetables formed the cornerstone of the Cretan diet. Cereals, mostly unprocessed and whole grains derived from wheat and barley, were consumed in various forms such as bread, rugs, and “chondros” (cracked-coarsely ground wheat). The main legumes included white beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, fava beans, and peas. Cretans consumed a wide variety of vegetables, always in season, including spinach, cabbages, green beans, zucchini, tomatoes, eggplants, leeks, celery, onions, radishes, cauliflowers, okra, peppers, turnips, and a plethora of wild mountain greens. Similarly, fruits were enjoyed seasonally, encompassing oranges, tangerines, grapes, apples, melons, pomegranates, figs, peaches, apricots, pears, quinces, plums, and cherries. Dried fruits such as figs and raisins were also popular. These foods were abundant in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, offering numerous health benefits including improved gut function and protection against cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity.





WILD GREENS

Wild greens are a prized component of Cretan cuisine, with over 120 species identified for human consumption. These greens grow prolifically across various terrains, from coastal zones to high mountain regions. The simplicity and purity of Cretan flavours are highlighted in its cuisine, with spices and aromatics used sparingly. The culinary repertoire of wild greens, vegetables, and pulses includes diverse preparations to maximise the bounty of nature. Notably, Cretan wild green pies feature multiple combinations of wild greens, varying by season and local flora, resulting in delightful aromas and flavours. While locals may use as many wild greens as nature provides, they exercise caution with potent-smelling or bitter-tasting varieties, reserving them for specific dishes. Bitter-tasting greens, in particular, are highly sought after for their unique culinary applications. The cultural significance of “The Wild Edible Greens of Crete - Ethnobotanical Practices” has been recognised and included in the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index.

Indicative wild greens commonly consumed raw, boiled, in pies, or stews include:

- Stamnagathi (*Cichorium spinosum*)
- Radikio (*Cichorium intybus*)
- Maratho (*Foeniculum vulgare*)
- Zohos (*Sonchus* sp.)
- Kafkalithra (*Tordylium apulum*)
- Stafilinakas (*Daucus carota*)
- Pentanevro (*Plantago lanceolata*)
- Ahatzikas or mironi (*Scandix pecten-veneris*)
- Lagoudohorto (*Prasium majus*)
- Galatsida (*Reichardia picroides*)
- Kritamos (*Crithmum maritimum*)
- Agoglossi (*Cynoglossum creticum*)
- Hiromourides (*Hypochoeris cretensis*)
- Avronies (*Bryonia cretica*)
- Lapatha (*Rumex obtusifolius*)



HERBS

They thrive across the mountains, cultivated lands, and coastal areas. Many of them are endemic, known since ancient times for their medicinal properties. Today, their usage is somewhat limited, but it's customary for everyone to enjoy a cup of malotira, dittany, or sage during the winter. The distinctive taste of Cretan cuisine owes much to the use of aromatic herbs. Botanical studies reveal that Crete boasts one of Europe's richest and most fascinating ecosystems, hosting a plethora of endemic plants. For instance, Malotira (*Siderites syriaca*) and Diktamos (*Origanum dictamnus*), the latter famed in antiquity for its antiseptic qualities.

Several herbs have been prized for their medicinal benefits since ancient times. Typically found in the inland mountain ranges, these herbs are carefully harvested by experienced gatherers, naturally dried, and packaged for later use, without any additional chemicals or additives. For centuries, these herbs have imbued the Cretan atmosphere with their fragrances, flourishing from the island's coastal areas to altitudes of 2000 meters. These herbs grow naturally across the island, with some unique to Crete and found nowhere else in the world. It's challenging to pinpoint the most significant among them, but the ones that evoke memories of childhood and the scents of our grandmothers' homes are particularly cherished. Malotira, dittany, marjoram, ladanina, sage, oregano, rosemary,

and thyme. Each herb in Crete has its own story intertwined with the island's traditions and beliefs. For generations, locals have attested to their various uses and benefits for the human body, with modern scientific research confirming these advantages in recent years.

- Dittany / Diktamos or Erontas (*Origanum dictamnus*)
- Sage / Faskomilo (*Salvia fruticosa* / *Salvia pomifera*)
- Marjoram / Mantzourana (*Origanum microphyllum*)
- Malotira / Cretan Mountain Tea (*Siderites syriaca*)
- Oregano / Rigani (*Origanum vulgare*, ssp *hirtum*)
- Thyme / Thymari (*Thymus capitatus*)
- Savory / Throumba (*Satureja thymbra*)
- Chamomile / Chamomili (*Marticaria chamomila*)
- Ladanum / Aladanos (*Cistus incanus*, ssp *creticus*)



CHEESES

Crete boasts a rich tradition of livestock farming and cheese-making, producing a diverse range of distinctive cheeses, each with its unique flavour profile and characteristics. The cultural element “Shepherding and the shepherd’s world in Psiloritis” has been included in the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index.

Here are some noteworthy Cretan cheeses:

Graviera:

Graviera stands as one of the most beloved and widely consumed cheeses in Crete. Crafted from sheep’s milk, occasionally blended with goat’s milk, Graviera possesses a firm texture and a subtly sweet, nutty taste. It’s delightful on its own or as an ingredient in various culinary creations.

Mizithra:

Mizithra, a fresh cheese made from a blend of sheep’s and/or goat’s milk, boasts a soft and creamy texture with a mild, slightly sweet flavour. Versatile in nature, it complements both sweet and savoury dishes, often crumbled over salads or desserts.

Anthotyros:

Anthotyros, akin to mizithra, is a soft, fresh cheese made from sheep’s or goat’s milk, offering a mild and delicate flavour. Commonly featured in Cretan cuisine, it finds its way into salads, pies, and desserts.

Kefalotyri:

Kefalotyri, a hard cheese derived from sheep’s or goat’s milk, sometimes a blend of both, boasts a robust texture and a tangy, salty taste. Often grated, it’s a staple ingredient in traditional Greek and Cretan dishes.

Xinomyzithra:

Xinomyzithra, also known as “sour mizithra,” is a soft cheese with a slightly tangy flavour. Fermented from mizithra, it develops a more pronounced taste, lending itself well to both savoury and sweet dishes.

Pichtogalo of Chania:

Pichtogalo Chanion, also dubbed “Chania’s strong milk,” is a matured Cretan cheese crafted from sheep’s milk. With its robust flavour and crumbly texture, it’s often enjoyed with bread or as part of a cheese platter.





Xigalo of Sitia:

Xigalo of Sitia boasts a creamy texture, exclusive to the Sitia region. Its taste resembles that of Xinomyzithra and Chania curd—rich, slightly sour, and fresh.

Tyrozouli:

Tyrozouli, a traditional cheese derived from domestic sheep and goat farming, is prepared by thickening boiled milk with sour cream, vinegar, or even fig milk. With a lightly salted or unsalted taste and an elastic texture, it's a versatile addition to various dishes.

Malaka:

Malaka is the curd resulting from the initial stages of Graviera cheese-making. Elastic and homogeneous, it's exclusively used in pies and especially the Chaniotiki cake, featuring four cheeses, lamb, and mint.

Anthogalo:

Anthogalo is a velvety cream, akin to a cross between yogurt and a milkshake, made from whole sheep's milk. Ideal as a side for dolmades, meatballs, and oily dishes, it also serves as a delectable dessert with a drizzle of honey.

Tulumotiri:

Tulumotiri, the Cretan equivalent of feta, offers a subtly sour, slightly spicy flavour with a soft texture. Produced from sheep and goat milk, it's aged in tulumia, inverted animal carcasses with the fur facing inward, enhancing the cheese's flavour.

Staka:

Staka a traditional Cretan dairy product crafted from the fat extracted from sheep's milk. With its rich, buttery consistency, it serves as a delectable spread or topping for bread and various dishes. A popular culinary delight involves combining Staka with eggs to create the mouthwatering dish known as "Staka with eggs."

CAROB

The carob tree is indigenous to the Mediterranean region, and its versatile pods have served various purposes, from culinary to medicinal applications. Embedded deeply in Cretan agriculture, historical and agrihistorical perspectives highlight the importance of carob cultivation, offering sustainable land use and resource management. Thriving in the Mediterranean climate and arid conditions, carob trees play a vital role in preventing soil erosion, contributing to sustainable agricultural practices on the island.

Harvesting carob involves collecting ripe pods, subsequently processed into syrup or ground into flour. This communal activity reflects Cretan tradition, where families and communities engage in seasonal pod gatherings. In Cretan cuisine, carob stands as a timeless element, showcasing the island's ties to nature, the ingenuity of its people, and the cultural importance of certain foods in shaping culinary practices. Amid evolving culinary trends, carob remains a constant in Cretan gastronomy, preserving culinary heritage.

The carob syrup is utilized in traditional recipes as a sweetener for desserts, yoghurt drizzles, or savory dishes. Carob's culinary versatility extends to its powder which is gluten-free with a natural sweetness. This flour-like substance finds application in baking and as a cocoa or chocolate substitute. Beyond its culinary uses, carob addresses digestive issues and has mild laxative properties. Additionally, carob pods, recognized for their nutritional value, have been employed as animal feed.

The cultural symbolism associated with the carob tree in Cretan traditions reflects notions of longevity and resilience, owing to the tree's ability to flourish in challenging environments. Moreover, it embodies fertility, adding cultural depth to the significance of carob in Cretan heritage. The cultural element "The agro-food tradition of carob in Crete" has been included in the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index.





WINE & TSIKOUDIA

Those who have found themselves in a “kazani” in Crete, meaning present during the production of tsikoudia (otherwise known as “Cretan raki,” a grape-based pomace spirit) in homes, courtyards, or other spaces that are not distilleries, know that the process takes the form of a celebration, a Dionysian revelry. The same witnesses might agree that traditional distillation should be considered as one of Greece’s examples of intangible cultural heritage. Especially in Crete, where making tsikoudia is a point of reference for social coexistence, encounters and shared joy, it is primarily a cultural process rather than just manufacturing.

The process for Cretans is the same as it was centuries ago. They keep the same method as it is part of Crete culture and history. First, the skins and seeds of grapes after being compressed (usually stepped as part of the tradition), are kept for about 40 days in barrels where the fermentation is done. The Raki cauldron is consisted of three basic parts. There is the pot, the lid and a pipe, used for the transfer of the steam. When it is the time of production, the producer puts the grapes marc with water in the cauldron. The fire is lit beneath the cauldron and the marc starts simmering. The fire must be not so strong nor too low. The intensity of the fire is important so as not the marc to be burned. During boiling, the alcohol of the marc is evaporating. The steam circulates in the pipe of the cauldron. At the external of the pipe there is cold water, so the steam condenses into a jar drop by drop.

These are the first drops of Cretan Raki, called “Protoraki”. The quality is measured by the Celsius degrees that is boiled. Usually a high quality raki is boiled at 20 degrees. The process of distillation is finished once all the grapes descent to the desired level in the cauldron.

Together with the heritage related with gastronomy Crete has an incredible story linked to viticulture and ampelografy. The island, hosts one of the most historic and rich vineyards in Europe, with evidence tracing its presence back to the early Minoan years. This ancient tradition evolved, expanded over the centuries, and harmonized with modern developments in winemaking, making Crete one of the primary wine-producing regions in Greece, Europe, and internationally.

The vineyard of Crete developed in close correlation with the island’s climate and soil, as well as its historical, social, and economic conditions. Monuments of Cretan winemaking attest to the development of specialized techniques and knowledge in wine production and storage, as well as the ancient Cretans’ recognition of the vineyard’s significance not only as a source of food and drink but also as a symbol with social and religious influence. Moreover, Crete’s interaction with other cultures played a crucial role in shaping its wine history and culture. On the one hand, it significantly contributed to the dissemination of wine culture in the Mediterranean, and on the other hand, as reflected in its ampelography, it was influenced by the exchange of grape varieties and winemaking practices.

The myth of Malvasia in Crete is intertwined with the island’s viticultural heritage. Legend suggests that Malvasia, a renowned grape variety, has ancient roots in Crete, dating back to the Minoan civilization. The myth elevates Malvasia to a symbol of the island’s winemaking prowess, with tales of its cultivation in ancient vineyards and its association with the cultural and economic identity of Crete. This mythical narrative contributes to the mystique surrounding Malvasia and its significance in Cretan winemaking. It is worth mentioning the relation among Crete and the Venetian culture, present in architecture, history, heri-tage but also in viticulture. The Querini family, Venetian nobles, played a pivotal role in the Malvasia story in Crete during the mediaeval period. Following the Venetian domination of the island, the Querini family actively promoted viticulture, particularly the cultivation of Malvasia grapes. They recognized the potential of Malvasia and its economic value, leading to the establishment of vineyards and the production of Malvasia wine on the island. This historical connection between the Querini family and Malvasia underscores the influence of external powers on Cretan viticulture during that era.

The oenological evolution in Crete has been and continues to be exceptionally significant and dynamic, with its wine culture continuing to evolve to this day. This evolution reflects the continuous and unabated effort of vintners and wine producers to produce high-quality wines based on modern requirements while maintaining their connection with the ancient wine traditions of the island. To this day, wine is present in the everyday Cretan table,

in religious and non-religious celebrations, in songs, and in myths, while traditional winemaking practices, closely connected to the daily lives of the island’s inhabitants, continue to be applied and passed down from generation to generation. Cretan vineyards continue to produce wines with a distinct character and flavor, reflecting the rich history and culture of the region. Each glass of Cretan wine is a gustatory experience and a journey through time, showcasing the tradition and art of winemaking on the island of Crete.

Local Varieties:

Vilana, Vidiano, Dafni, Thrapathiri, Kotsifali, Liatiko, Malvasia, Mantilari, Muscat of Spinas, Plyto, Romeiko, Tachtas

Types of Wines:

White dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet

Rosé dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet

Red dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet





QUALITY CERTIFICATIONS LABELS OF RAW MATERIALS AND SERVICES

1. PDO & PGE QUALITY CERTIFICATIONS

PDO

“Designation of origin” refers to the name identifying a product:

- a. originating from a specific place, region or, in exceptional cases, country
- b. whose quality or characteristics are mainly or exclusively due to the particular geographical environment, including inherent natural and human factors
- c. for which all production stages are carried out within the defined geographical area.



PGI

“Geographical indication” refers to the name identifying a product:

- a. originating from a specific place, region or country
- b. with certain quality characteristics, reputation or other attributes mainly attributable to its geographical origin
- c. for which at least one production stage is carried out within the defined geographical area.



Plant-based Production			
A/A	County- company headquarters	Kind of product	Number of Businesses
1	Chania	PDO Olive Oil	41
2		PGE Olive Oil	48
3		PGE Rug	3
4		PDO Orang	5
5		PGE Raisin	1
6	Rethymno	PDO Olive Oil	28
7		PGE Olive Oil	1
8		PGE Rug	1
9	Heraklion	PDO Olive Oil	134
10		PGE Olive Oil	11
11		PGE Rug	5
12		PDO Edible Olive	3
13		PGE Raisin	12
14		PGE Melekouni	1
15	Lasithi	PDO Olive Oil	71
16		PGE Olive Oil	7

Animal based production			
A/A	County- company headquarters	Kind of product	Number of Businesses
1	Chania	PDO Graviera cheese of Crete	5
2		PDO Pichtogalo cheese of Chania	3
3		PDO Xinomizithra cheese of Crete	1
4		PDO Cretan pine honey	8
5	Rethymno	PDO Graviera cheese of Crete	13
6		PDO Pichtogalo cheese of Chania	1
7		PDO Xinomizithra cheese of Crete	6
8		PDO Cretan pine honey	3
9		PDO Manouri cheese of Crete	1
10		PDO Feta cheese of Crete	1
11	Heraklion	PDO Graviera cheese of Crete	9
12		PDO Cretan pine honey	8
13		PDO Xinomizithra cheese of Crete	6
14	Lasithi	PDO Cretan pine honey	3
15		PDO Xygalo cheese of Sitia	1

2. AGRONUTRITIONAL COOPERATION OF THE REGION OF CRETE

The “Agronutritional Cooperation” is an initiative of the “Region of Crete”. It is a non-profit company with the aim of highlighting and promoting the quality products produced within its Region.

The organisation’s key advantage lies in its institutional role, serving farmers, processors, traders, craftsmen, local communities, and products in general, ensuring a relationship of solvency and stability among them. Among its planned and implemented actions for the certification and promotion of the island’s raw materials, some noteworthy initiatives include:

- The “European Food Masters – Taste the Authentic” Programme: Launched by the Agro-nutritional Cooperation, this initiative focuses on promoting Cretan products in three categories: PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) PGI (Protected Geographical Index|), and Organic Products. Through various actions, the campaign aims to enhance the recognisability and consumption of these products in both domestic and German markets.
- Branding Initiatives: The organization has created and consolidated brands such as “Crete – land of values”, “cretan cuisine”, “cretan grocery”, “cretan brunch”, “cretan taste”, and “open wineries.” These brands contribute significantly to certifying product value, increasing demand in Crete’s hotels, and promoting the island’s culinary heritage, supporting gastronomic and wine tourism.



LABELS OF THE AGRONUTRITIONAL COOPERATION OF THE REGION OF CRETE RELATED WITH LOCAL RAW MATERIALS:

“Crete” Label:

Established in 2012, this label aims to make local products bearing this brand recognizable and competitive in trade, while acquiring a strong commercial identity on the national and international markets. It differentiates agricultural products and food from the island based on production quality standards, standardization, supply level, and promotion, enhancing consumer preference. 108 local products-enterprises have been standardized with the label “Crete”.



“Cretan Grocery” Label:

Certifies retail outlets of Cretan products meeting specified standards, providing consumers with confidence in purchasing quality products with high nutritional value. Products with the “Crete” label are available in these stores, reinforcing their commercial identity. Therefore, the “Cretan grocery” label highlights and promotes retail stores, as it guarantees the origin and quality of the products.



“Cretan Taste” Label:

Highlights the island’s culinary culture and promotes local products to visitors. This label identifies the buffet corner of central restaurants in all-inclusive hotels, featuring local recipes prepared with Cretan quality products.

“Cretan Cuisine” Label:

Created to promote local cuisine and accentuate Cretan gastronomy, this label recognises mass catering businesses such as restaurants, taverns, hotel restaurants, and agro-tourism lodges offering Cretan flavours and hospitality. It serves as a seal of approval for consumers, connecting the island’s primary sector with tourism, enhancing the island’s value as a gastronomic destination.



Cretan Brunch

“Take a piece of Crete with you, wherever you go.”

A Cretan Brunch is a light meal enjoyed between breakfast and lunch, designed to be healthy, nutritious, and convenient for on-the-go consumption. In Crete, the image of a hardworking farmer with his traditional woven bag, filled with paximadi (rusk), cheese, olives, and tomatoes, embodies the essence of the mid-morning snack, known locally as “dekatiano.” As the sun climbs high in the sky, signalling a break from work, it’s time to indulge in a quick, revitalizing bite.

The Cretan Brunch pays homage to this culinary tradition, embracing the principles and values of the renowned Cretan diet. With a focus on healthy nutrition and the region’s rich produce, the modern Cretan Brunch offers a tantalizing array of flavours synonymous with Crete. From olive oil-based dishes to fresh vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and lettuce, accompanied by local cheeses such as graviera and anthotyro, and traditional cold cuts like apaki and syglino, every bite encapsulates the essence of Cretan gastronomy.

Open Wineries

The “Open Wineries” label celebrates the accessibility of the island’s wineries to the public, forming an integral part of efforts to promote Cretan gastronomy. By highlighting winery sites open for visitation, the Agronutritional Cooperation aims to cultivate wine tourism on the island, showcasing local wines and indigenous grape varieties.



3. AKOMM - PSILORITIS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Agreement of Quality – Local Commercial Sign

The Psiloritis Development Agency of Local Government embodies the collaborative spirit of enterprises and organizations in the Psiloritis region. Its primary aim is to establish minimum operational standards to create a unique agro-touristic product named “Psiloritis – Crete”. These standards encompass functional regulations, culinary offerings, quality and origin of raw materials, as well as aesthetic considerations. Presently, 15 enterprises have acquired the Local Commercial Sign.

4. WE DO LOCAL

We do local – Symbol of Locality & Authenticity

“We do local” serves as a symbol of locality and authenticity, a result of cohesive efforts by Local Production and Hospitality SA (for promotional services), Cosmocert SA (for certification services), and Local Food Experts sce (for integrated development services). Targeting tourism businesses, it:

- Certifies, rewards, and promotes their services, providing an additional measurable promotional tool.
- Aims to spotlight businesses adhering to modern and essential business practices.
- Is manifest in all actions and services offered, fostering local production and hospitality.
- Acknowledges and rewards other certification standards, incorporating them into necessary certification criteria like ISO, Haccp, Travelife, etc.

The evaluation and potential certification of hotel units follow a one-year cycle.

5. PLOIGOS TRADEMARKS

“ΟΙΚΟΚΤΙΜΑΤΑ OF CRETE” AND “0 km”

The trademark of this Network is affixed to the label of the final product of each producer, assuring consumers that it adheres to the procedures outlined by this Cretan Cottage-Industry Network. Products bearing the “Cretan Cottage-Industry Network” logo signify that they are:

“Proven, Local, Safe, Healthy, and Legal.

Produced collectively with an environmental and social approach”.

Both trademarks are approved by the Hellenic Ministry of Development & Investment.

“ΟΙΚΟΚΤΙΜΑΤΑ OF CRETE” label represents:

- Vegetable-based products sourced from Cretan ingredients comprising over 80% of the recipe
- Animal-based products derived from animals fed locally cultivated animal feed, with at least 70% originating from the Region of Crete



The “0 km” label represents products with a zero-carbon footprint on the environment:

The “0 km” logo signifies the ultimate local product, emphasizing the environmentally friendly practices of home technical products, with ingredients entirely sourced from Crete denoting:

- Vegetable-based products sourced from Cretan ingredients comprising 100% of the recipe
- Animal-based products derived from animals fed locally cultivated animal feed, with 100% originating from the Region of Crete



6. GREEK MARK

Certified products and services for the “Greek Mark”

ELGO DIMITRA has been designated as the overseeing body for awarding the Greek Label to milk and dairy products. It conducts checks on relevant companies to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and registration in the “Electronic Register of Greek Products and Services”. ELGO also monitors the market to ensure correct usage of the Hellenic Mark on these products. Companies should submit an application to ELGO DIMITRA, in order to be certified for producing and/or packaging and/or marketing of Greek PDO cheeses and be automatically entitled to use the Greek Mark.



INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS AND NETWORKS

The Region of Crete participates with a dynamic and long-standing presence in dozens of **international exhibitions** through which partnerships, networks and new opportunities for local development are developed.

Such examples are:

- ANUGA 2023 International Fair, the world’s largest food and beverage exhibition, in Cologne, Germany.
- International Alternative Tourism Fair “Caravan Salon 2023” in Düsseldorf, Germany,
- F.R.E.E. in Munich (22 - 26/02) the largest tourism, leisure and camping exhibition in Bavaria.
- IFT International Tourism Fair in Belgrade, Serbia
- International Tourism Fair “FERIE FOR ALL”, in Herning, Denmark.
- International Tourism Fair IMTM in Israel.
- International Organic Food and Beverage Fair, “BIOFACH - Vivaness 2023” in Nuremberg
- International Tourism Exhibition “World Travel Market 2022” in London During the exhibition, the Greek Travel Awards were presented at a special event organised by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (EOT) and voted for by the British tourism market, of which Crete won two: the “Best Beach Destination” award and the “Best Gastronomy” award.

NETWORKING / CLUSTERING

The Region of Crete participates in national, international and European networks such as:

Arepo

The **Association of European Regions for Products of Origin** (AREPO) is a network of regions and producer associations that deals with products of origin. AREPO aims to promote and defend the interests of producers and consumers of European regions involved in the valorization of quality food products.

Euromontana

Euromontana is the multi-sectoral association for cooperation and development of mountain areas. Euromontana’s mission is to promote living in mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

Natura

Natura 2000 is a network of nature protection areas in the territory of the European Union. It is made up of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas designated under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, respectively. The network includes both terrestrial and Marine Protected Areas. The Natura 2000 network covered more than 18% of the European Union’s land area and more than 7% of its marine area in 2022. Areas of Crete Oros Giouxtas, Asterousia Ori, Nisos Chrysi and many more.

CPMR (Conference on Peripheral Maritime Regions)

Additionally, the Region of Crete, in the context of achieving the objectives of the Regional Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy for 2020, participates in the European Social Networks, “**ELISAN**”: “**European Local Inclusion and Social Action Network**” and “**ENSA**”: “**European Network of Social Authorities**”. These are networks that pursue the objectives of social administration in a complementary and integrated way, covering both the policy-making field in all social issues and the field of social policy implementation at the level of services.

Also participates in the **ERRIN (European Regions Research and Innovation Network-www.errin.eu)**, which it also coordinates the Network’s Thematic Group on Blue Growth, and presented its action and the expected results of the EUSAIR (EU Adriatic Ionian Macro-regional Strategy). The action of the Region of Crete in the ERRIN Network is of particular value for achieving this objective, due to the use of research and innovation for the priorities of Crete, which are also in line with the implementation of its Regional Strategy for Smart Specialisation.

OTHER PARTICIPATIONS IN CONSORTIA AND EUROPEAN OR GLOBAL NETWORKS. INDICATIVELY:

1. Heraklion Municipality - Unesco Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

Heraklion City, the largest city of Crete participates in the Creative Cities Network of UNESCO. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity and innovation as key drivers for a more sustainable and inclusive urban development. Heraklion was recognized as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2023.

In general, all municipalities, development companies and chambers of the island participate in international related networks and programs.

2. “Asterousia mountains” and “Samaria” (Samaria Gorge) in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program (MAB).

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves of the **MAB Programme** consists of a dynamic and interactive network of sites of excellence. It fosters the harmonious integration of people and nature for sustainable development through participatory dialogue; knowledge sharing; poverty reduction and human well-being improvements; respect for cultural values and society’s ability to cope with change - thus contributing to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Accordingly, the Network is one of the main international tools to develop and implement sustainable development approaches in a wide array of contexts.

3. Sitia Geopark & Psiloritis Natural Park - UNESCO Global Geoparks

Geoparks are areas that aim to protect and highlight all elements of the Earth’s heritage, with an emphasis on rocks and relief and their use for sustainable local development of rural areas. Their main objectives are the sustainable management of their areas and the support of the local economy and products through the development of alternative forms of tourism, such as Geo-tourism.

Geoparks were established as an institution in 2000 by four rural areas of Europe, among which the Petrified Forest of Lesvos with the creation of the European Geoparks Network. In 2004, UNESCO, recognizing their role, placed the European geoparks under its auspices and created the World Geoparks network based on them. The Sitia and Psiloritis Geoparks participate in the European Network of Geoparks, which currently has 98 Geoparks in European countries, as well as in the World Network of UNESCO Geoparks, which has 213 Geoparks from 48 countries around the world.

4. The Universities and research centers of Crete

The Universities and research centers of Crete -University of Crete, Mediterranean University of Crete, Technical University of Crete, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania- participate in networks designed to support scientific collaborations and in a large number of European educational programmes, which aim to strengthen inter-university cooperation, improve the quality of education, develop academic and student mobility, and cultivate European citizenship while preserving national identity and cultural self-awareness. For example have concluded

more than 700 bilateral agreements with collaborating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through the European Erasmus+ programme and other partners in the international environment, while they also participates in numerous education and exchange programmes.

Also, the Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas (FORTH) which located in Crete and it was founded in 1983, is one of the largest research centers in Greece with well-organized facilities, highly qualified personnel and a reputation as a top-level research institution worldwide.

With:

- 567 active funded projects
- 203 EU grants
- 180 Marie Curie grants
- 41 ERC grants
- 181 Collaborating Faculty members

5. The Development Companies of Crete

The Development Companies of Crete (indicative: Heraklion Development Agency S.A. O.T.A., A.K.O.M.M. - Psiloritis Development Agency of Local Government S.A. O.T.A., Organization for the Development of Crete S.A., Development Agency of Lassithi S.A. O.T.A., Educational Development Company Ploigos) participate in a multitude of international and european networks and programs.

DAKOS

Many still make paiximadi (rug) today, but no one makes paiximadi like the Cretans! Not without reason, the Cretan rug is today a “protected geographical indication product”. Rugs in Crete are a way of life! “Æritharokouloures (Barley rolls), dakoi, from wheat, from barley, aftozimo or heftazimo or ftazimo rug (that means that it ferments “on its own”, it doesn’t contain sourdough or yeast), names that refer to the distant or even the recent past, when the necessities of life did not allow the Cretan household to leaven its bread every day. Double baking removed the water from the bread, made it hard but also tastier, it could be kept for many weeks or even months. And the Cretans had found many ways of exploiting their rugs.

One of the most famous Cretan dishes is dakos, a salad made with barley rusk, tomatoes, galomizithra cheese (or feta cheese), and olive oil. This dish is simple yet flavorful, and is often served as a light lunch or appetizer.

This tradition has never been uprooted from Crete. Today, every professional bakery prepares rugs and in recent years a competition has begun to be observed, who will prepare the best!

*References from “Cretan Traditional Cuisine, The Miracle of Cretan Diet”,
Nikos and Maria Psyllakis, 1995*



WILD GREENS AND VEGETABLES

The Cretan diet has always been rich in greens and vegetables. The taste habits of each region determined not only the combinations of vegetables that came from the Cretan nature but also the cooking methods.

Greens raw, boiled, or fried for salad. Stamnagathi, papules, agalatsida, radish etc. plain with olive oil, lemon and salt or combined with tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini, eggs or even legumes make up the countless Cretan salads. One of the most common cretan salad, except of the boiled greens, is the “ofti salad”. “Ofti salad” contains potatoes, onion, olives, olive oil and lemon, and sometimes boiled egg or/and caper.

Traditional pies with wild and non-wild greens, but also with vegetables such as onions and zucchinis, fried, grilled or grilled, small and large.

Delicious food for the table, such as “artichokes with beans”, omelette with zucchini or green chimuli, simpetherio (unrelated vegetables “simpetheriazoun”, i.e. they are related to each other in the tsoukali!), fried mushrooms, kentanes with kerevizi and tomato (leek with celery and tomato), but also the beloved dolmadakia. That is, rolls made of vegetable leaves such as vine leaves, zucchini flowers, cabbage or goula leaves, wrapped with vegetable and wheat filling. Later, when rice was introduced to the country, it replaced wheat in many recipes, so it is more common today and is one of the most beloved dishes of Cretans, eaten both at the everyday and at the festive table, at home, in kafeneion (local cafes), but also in restaurants.

*References from “Cretan Traditional Cuisine, The Miracle of Cretan Diet”,
Nikos and Maria Psyllakis, 1995*



PIES

The Cretan diet offers health and longevity and it has been internationally recognized as a scientifically sound dietary standard. Founded on ingredients offered by the local production, and hence its economy, such as olive oil, honey, wild and aromatic greens, wheat, agricultural and viticulture products. With a focus on the local ingredients and cooking methods, the most widespread pies in the countryside and the urban centres of Crete are the pies cooked in a pan, like the ‘hortopites’ (wild greens), marathopites (fennel-based pies), cheese pies (sour, sweet or savoury with mint), ‘nerates mizithropites’ (the dough is fried while still wet), ‘sarikopites’ and ‘agn(i)opites’ (cheese pies), ‘kreatotourtes’ (meat pies), the pies of Sfakia, etc. A second category is the baked pies, like ‘tzoulamas’ (dominated by rice), ‘mizithrmpoureko’ (another kind of cheese pie), and the light pies that remind one of cake, with the most popular one being the raisin pie, etc.

In the past, people made a sludgy dough by mixing water and flour. Most of today’s pie preparations based on flour are variations of the oldest pie, which in its original form was baked on heated stones. Notable survivors of this pie, often called ‘plakous’ (loaves), are the Cretan ‘plakoftes’ or ‘plakopites’, filled with leafy aromatic greens that grow on the island. These pies are baked on hot stones by experi-enced housewives, and they are also found under a different name in other regions of Greece, as in most cultures that use cereals.

The Cretan eating habits is of course a synthesis of social and cultural phenomena, linked to the cycle of life, its major stations (birth, baptism, marriage, death) and events signaled by the religious calendar. In addition, the coexistence of the Cretans with various ethnicities over the centuries, and in particular the coexistence of Christianity and Islam until the first two decades of the 20th century, gradually formed a common tradition in the diet. The pita ‘tzoulamas’ is an example of such cultural osmosis.

References from “Culinary Cultural Heritage of Greece - The Pie”, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Directorate of Modern Cultural Assets and Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2016



SNAILS

In the Cretan diet and cuisine, foraging plays a prominent role. The Cretans have always used what they could find in nature and cooked with the “vriskoumeno” (what they have or found). The great dietary tradition of wild greens and herbs as well as that of snails finds its roots in this practice. One of the culinary specialties of Crete! Cretans not only love snails but cook them in dozens of ways that follow the seasonality of the various species. In the spring the combinations with vegetables such as fennel, broad beans and wild greens, in the summer with zucchini, with okra, with aubergines, with wheat and tomato, or Boubouristoi!

In Crete there are more than 100 recipes for cooking snails. “Boubouristoi” snails is one of the most beloved by the locals and “Charakianoï” snails is one of the rarest.

“BOUBOURISTOI” SNAILS

Snails cooked “boubourista” (face down) in the pan, with rosemary, vinegar & extra virgin olive oil.

“CHARAKIANOI” SNAILS

The snails are cooked just with sea salt between two flat stones (“charakia”) in the fire of the woods.

Also Cretans cook them with groats, zucchini & potatoes, black-eyed peas, stew, with dried okra or fill zucchini flowers with the flesh of snails and many other recipes, depending on the imagination of the cook. Snails are an ideal snack during periods of fasting and especially on Good Friday when we cook them with vinegar.



OFTO

In Crete, meat from small animals is still consumed today. Traditionally Cretans rarely ate beef or cow meat. Pork a little more often. The favorite meat is even today that of goats and sheep which are raised on the island and are free grazing. This meat, however, is almost always cooked with greens, vegetables, legumes. These combinations are impressive and give amazing flavors. Modern research proves that even in Minoan times the Cretans cooked meat with vegetables and legumes. Among the most beloved recipes are the lamb with ascolymbrus (wild greens), meat (lamb, goat or pork) with fresh braised beans, meat with chickpeas, lamb with artichokes.

Also an important place in the Cretan cuisine and in the hearts of the Cretans is “ofto” meat. That is, meat grilled on coals. The shepherds of Psiloritis do not wait for coals to cook their oftto, as is done in the rest of Greece. That is why in Psiloritis the meat of the year is called “Antikristo”, because it is cooked facing the fire. They open a small pit in the ground where they light the fire, spread large pieces of meat on spits that they make at that time and place them on stones around the fire, to be cooked with the temperature released by the burning of the wood. That is, they are very hasty. This rush can be easily explained: it has its roots in the years of slavery. Spitting required fire, and the fire with its smoke betrays the position of the one who lights it. The “Chainides,” the rebels of old, had to hurry, because they lived in constant pursuit. The shepherds in Madaras followed another tactic in roasting the oftto. They dug a somewhat deeper pit and waited for only the coals to be made. In Sfakia who did not have the fear of the conquerors, because the conquerors never lived in the unfathomable mountains and gorges of Sfakia, so they never roasted the meat with the flame of the wood, just as they did not put stones around the pit of the oftus.

- It is food from the cuisine of the mountains (the countryside) and is not urbanized because it is normally cooked in the countryside.
- It is a festive, exceptional dish (that is, it is made exceptionally, not every day).
- It presupposes gathering, it is never cooked for one person!

*References from “Cretan Traditional Cuisine, The Miracle of Cretan Diet”,
Nikos and Maria Psyllakis, 1995*



KAKAVIA

Seafood holds a significant place in Cretan cuisine, particularly among coastal communities, owing to the island’s proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. While grilled octopus, fried calamari, and stuffed squid are popular seafood dishes, the quintessential fish dish is Kakavia, a hearty fish soup named after the tool used to catch the fish for the recipe. Kakavia is a cherished fisherman’s fare found throughout the Greek island area, with variations in recipes across Crete, each offering a delicious and nourishing meal, especially beloved by coastal inhabitants.



GASTRONOMY & RELIGION

06

In Crete, as in many other regions with a strong cultural and religious identity, the relationship between gastronomy and the Orthodox Christian religion is intertwined. The local cuisine of Crete has been shaped not only by geographical factors but also by the historical and cultural influences of the Orthodox Christian tradition. While the relationship between gastronomy and the Orthodox religion in Crete is complex, it highlights the integral role that food plays in expressing cultural identity, celebrating religious traditions, and fostering community bonds. The rich culinary heritage of the island is deeply intertwined with its religious and cultural history. Some aspects of the relationship between gastronomy and the Orthodox religion in Crete can be sum up with

In Crete, like in many other regions with strong cultural and religious roots, gastronomy and the Orthodox Christian faith are closely intertwined. The local cuisine of Crete reflects not only geographical influences but also the historical and cultural significance of Orthodox Christian traditions. This complex relationship underscores the pivotal role of food in expressing cultural identity, observing religious practices, and nurturing communal bonds. Embedded within the island’s rich culinary heritage are various aspects that illustrate the intersection of gastronomy and Orthodox religion:

1. Fasting Traditions:

- **Lenten Period:** Orthodox Christians observe fasting periods, notably during Lent before Easter, abstaining from certain foods, particularly animal products. Cretan cuisine, with its emphasis on plant-based dishes, aligns with these fasting traditions.

2. Use of Olive Oil:

- **Symbolic Significance** Olive oil, a staple in Cretan cuisine, holds symbolic importance in Orthodox Christian tradition as a symbol of purity and anointing, commonly used in cooking and dressing various dishes.



3. Seasonal and Local Ingredients:

- **Harvest Celebrations:** Agricultural cycles are celebrated in line with the Orthodox Christian calendar, with festivals and feasts coinciding with seasonal availability of local ingredients, reflecting in Cretan culinary offerings.

4. Religious Celebrations and Feasts:

- **Special Foods:** Certain dishes are prepared specifically for religious celebrations and feasts, including traditional sweets, bread, and other festive foods, enhancing the significance of communal gatherings.
- **Community Gatherings:** Religious events often bring communities together, and food plays a central role in these gatherings. Shared meals are a way of fostering community and expressing hospitality.

5. Monastic Influence:

- **Monastic Products:** Historically, monasteries in Crete have played a significant role in agricultural production, producing olive oil, wine, and other agricultural goods, often associated with a sense of purity and authenticity.

6. Culinary Traditions and Rituals:

- **Preparation of Holy Bread:** Rituals such as the preparation of holy bread or “prospora” hold importance in the Orthodox Christian Church, with bread being a fundamental component of Cretan cuisine and religious ceremonies.
- **Wine in Religious Rituals:** Wine, a significant product in Crete, is also utilized in religious rituals, including the Eucharist.

7. Cultural Identity:

- **Preservation of Tradition:** Efforts to preserve traditional Cretan culinary practices often coincide with broader initiatives aimed at maintaining cultural and religious identity.
- **Symbolism in Food:** Certain foods and culinary practices carry symbolic meanings related to religious themes, reinforcing cultural and spiritual connections.

8. Philoxenia (Hospitality):

- **Religious Virtue:** Hospitality, a cherished value in the Orthodox Christian tradition, is reflected in the warm and generous hospitality found in Cretan homes and eateries, embodying the spirit of philoxenia.

MUSIC

In Crete, the connection between music and gastronomy is deeply woven into the island's cultural tapestry. Traditional Cretan music, with its lively rhythms and heartfelt melodies, frequently accompanies communal gatherings and celebratory events, providing an immersive experience intertwined with culinary customs.

During local festivities like weddings or festivals, music assumes a pivotal role in setting the ambiance, enriching the enjoyment of traditional Cretan cuisine. This bond transcends mere sound; it encompasses shared emotions, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging fostered by both music and food.

In tavernas and restaurants, live music performances often complement the dining experience, offering a multisensory journey for both locals and visitors. The fusion of traditional melodies with the rich flavours of Cretan dishes contributes to a holistic cultural immersion, where music and gastronomy converge to honour the island's heritage.



During festive occasions in Crete, traditional Cretan music takes centre stage. The harmonious sounds of the lyra, a bowed string instrument, accompanied by the lute and laouto, create a vibrant and rhythmic atmosphere. These traditional instruments, skillfully played by local musicians, evoke melodies steeped in the island’s rich cultural legacy.

Dances such as the syrtos and pentozali are commonly performed during celebrations, accompanied by the spirited tunes of Cretan music. Music not only entertains but also serves as a catalyst for community bonding and celebration. The cultural significance of the “Leaping Dance of Sitia” has earned its inclusion in the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index.

Be it a wedding, a local festival, or any joyous occasion, the lively and festive notes of Cretan music enhance the overall experience, establishing it as an indispensable element of celebratory events on the island.

CERAMIC

Undoubtedly, Crete boasts the richest tradition of ceramic art among all Greek regions, representing a unique legacy that has endured for millennia. Cretan ceramists traditionally resisted foreign influences in their fundamental patterns, ensuring continuity and harmony with their ancestral heritage across prehistoric, historical, and Byzantine periods.

Over the years, four major pottery centres have operated across the island, each catering to the agricultural needs of its respective region: Nochia, Margarites, Thrapsanos, and Kentri, spanning from west to east. Additionally, individual workshops have thrived in various parts of Crete, such as Karoti in Rethymnon, Agios Pantes, Asfentyle, Vraskas, Exopoli, and Kampanos in Chania. These workshops often benefited from the seasonal presence of Thrapsani or Margaritsana artisans in their vicinity.

Today, ceramic art in Crete is primarily concentrated in two of its remaining pottery centres: Thrapsanos and Margarites. Efforts are underway to integrate these centres, “The pottery tradition of Thrapsano (Heraklion, Crete)” and the “Pottery of the Margarites. (Mylopotamos of Rethymnon, Crete)” along with their cultural significance, into the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index.

The utilisation of ceramics in Crete spanned various aspects of agricultural, domestic, and religious life. While the specific types varied, vessels were tailored to specific functions according to their shape:





- Ladopithara (olive oil pithos), krasopithara (wine pithos), kourupia, and melokourupa were used for agricultural storage.
- Pitchers kept water cool from springs, while travellers carried flasks akin to those used by the Minoans for water, wine, or raki.
- Shepherds utilised vessels for milk, galetia, along with utensils for milking, feeding, and watering animals, while others supported agricultural tasks.
- Lekanidi (small basin) and pestles aided in food preparation, while tsikalia, juvetzia, and kalitsounoplakies were used in cooking.
- Jugs, baskets, earthenware plates, and mugs adorned dining tables.
- Kolymbithra and fraski served religious purposes, alongside measuring vessels and architectural elements.
- Additionally, ceramics were employed in games.

References from “Museum of Cretan Ethnology”

WEAVING

The art of weaving has remained an integral part of life on the island of Crete throughout its history. Dating back to the Minoan era, weaving stood as Crete’s second most exported product, following olive oil. The islanders hold this ancient tradition in high regard, passing it down through generations with a dedication unparalleled in many other Greek regions. Each locality boasts a unique cultural heritage shaped by historical events, social dynamics, environmental influences, population migrations, foreign interactions, marriage customs, clothing styles, household arrangements, and religious beliefs. Efforts to preserve this heritage are evident, with initiatives like the inclusion of “The Weaving Art and Its Preservation in Asterousia, Crete” in the Greek National Intangible Cultural Heritage Index. Weaving, encompassing not only the craft itself but also the community it sustains, reflects the island’s indigenous cultural identity and serves as an enduring testament to folk tradition. While meeting practical needs, weaving is also an expression of artistic creativity. Interacting with both natural and social environments, weavers weave tales with coloured threads, infusing each piece with personal narratives, emotions, and experiences. Crafted from sheep wool, cotton, linen, and silk, woven fabrics address agricultural and economic needs, while also embracing principles of sustainability. Richly decorated with woven, embroidered, or knitted motifs, these fabrics feature symbolic designs, geometric patterns, and nature-inspired themes, showcasing a diverse array of colours, aesthetics, and technical intricacies.

- “Bagkali”: A narrow, long white fabric, embroidered at both ends, used to cover horse saddles.
- “Vourgia”: A sack for travellers and shepherds.
- Large sacks for farmers.
- Work aprons for men and women.
- “Anthomantela”: Cheese-making cloth.
- Wedding sacks: Large, colourful sacks, initially used to transport dowries and later repurposed for transporting wheat, barley, and flour.

References from “Museum of Cretan Ethnology”





In Crete, Greece, the tradition of dining establishments is deeply entrenched in local culture. Whether it's a taverna, cafenion, or estiatorio, each establishment plays a crucial role in the island's rich culinary and social scene. These diverse establishments contribute to Crete's vibrant gastronomic landscape, offering a plethora of options for locals and tourists to savour traditional flavours and experience the island's warm hospitality.

Kafeneio: A casual gathering place primarily for men, where coffee is enjoyed alongside games like backgammon, often accompanied by local brandy or raki with meze after its establishment as an alcoholic drink in the 1970s.

Cafe-ouzeri: Introduced by refugees from Asia Minor in the early 20th century, these establishments, though dwindling, provide spaces for socialisation and the consumption of ouzo, usually accompanied by mezes.

Mageriko (cookhouse): Catering to the masses, these establishments offer cooked meals to groups or one's own without an emphasis on alcohol consumption.

Restaurant: Urban dining spaces where customers come specifically to dine, alone or with friends, often accompanied by drinks, attracting a more affluent clientele.

Tavern: A place for both dining and drinking, usually offering wine, where gatherings occur spontaneously or by arrangement, welcoming customers from all walks of life (urban people, farmers, high- or low-income people etc.)





GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN CRETE

Culinary tourism in Crete is undergoing a dynamic development and presents a distinctive opportunity to explore the island's rich culinary and cultural heritage. Numerous initiatives and organisations have been instrumental in enriching the gastronomy tourism experience, showcasing the unique fusion of culture and cuisine that characterises Crete. Stand-out initiatives like "AGROXENIA," operating under Hellas Agritourism, are dedicated to promoting sustainable agritourism experiences in Crete. This initiative facilitates direct engagement with local farmers, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in agricultural practices, sample fresh produce, and experience rural living. "Wines of Crete" unites the island's winemakers to champion Crete's rich viticulture tradition, local grape varieties, winemaking customs, and wines through activities such as wine tours and participation in international exhibitions. The Agrifood Nutrition Cooperation of the Region of Crete strategically supports the agro-nutritional sector, forging direct links with tourism and catering establishments by organising events and managing national and European programmes and projects focused on Cretan products. "We Do Local" represents a comprehensive philosophy guiding companies to promote local customs, traditions, and cuisine while supporting regional producers, respecting the environment, and fostering sustainability. This certification standard, a collaboration of Local Production and Hospitality SA, Cosmocert SA, and Local Food Experts SCE, recognises businesses adopting a modern, essential approach. Moreover, notable initiatives, actions, and practices are independently developed by large hotel units in Crete, focusing on documenting, adopting, and promoting the Cretan diet and cuisine. Equally noteworthy are the initiatives and practices of numerous smaller businesses contributing to gastronomy tourism by offering experiences such as cooking classes, tastings, and culinary tours. Their dedication plays a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating the essence of Cretan gastronomy, creating an interconnected ecosystem that benefits both local communities and visitors seeking an authentic taste of Cretan cuisine.

RESEARCH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Over recent years, a plethora of educational programs and research projects focused on the Cretan diet have been initiated and continue to progress. University faculties, schools, local authorities, together with lifelong learning centres, other associations, and professional clusters, are committed to implementing such projects, evident in their numerous actions. At the university level in Crete, departments, courses, and research projects directly or indirectly related to the study of nutrition are developed at the University of Crete, the Hellenic Mediterranean University, and the Technical University of Crete. Additionally, the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH) in Crete implements a vast number of research projects. FORTH is Greece's premier multidisciplinary research institution, boasting well-organised facilities, highly qualified personnel, and a reputation as a top-level research institution globally. Periodic programs on the Cretan diet are also implemented by schools to instil education on healthier lifestyles from an early age. Related educational programmes are also developed by the Region of Crete, municipalities, and museums on the island.



11

AMBASSADORS & SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

AMBASSADORS



Giannis Apostolakis

Executive Chef of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH) & President of the Board / Head of the Cretan Gastronomy Network



Konstantinos Chartzoulakis

Agriculturist, Senior Researcher at NAGREF- Institute for Olive Tree & Subtropical Plants & Former Director at NAGREF- Institute for Olive Tree & Subtropical Plants



Nikos Frantzeskakis

President of the Board of Agrozenia Association - Hellas Agrotourism and Multifunctional Farms.



Sevasti Krasanaki

President of the Women's Association of Episkopi "Ergani"



Panagiotis Magganas

Owner of Peskesi
Restaurant and
Peskesi Organic Farm
Authentic Cretan Cuisine
Farm to table
Sustainable



Dr Alexandros Stefanakis

Veterinarian & Scientific
- technical support of
companies & institutions
of the agri-food sector
and Research Associate in
University Institutions in
Animal Production, Quality,
Hygiene and Food Safety.



Stelios Trilirakis

Owner of the traditional
Cretan gastronomy
center "Ntounias"
(agricultural farm and
tavern) Livestock and
organic farmer, graduate
of tourism profession.



Isabella Zampetaki

Food&Travel Writer /
Author



Antonis Kafatos

Emeritus Professor of Preventive
Medicine and Nutrition,
School of Medicine,
University of Crete



Dr. Georgios Apladas

Lecturer of the Department of
Business Administration & Tourism
Hellenic Mediterranean University
Heraklion, Crete



George Arampatzis

Associate Professor in the School
of Production Engineering and
Management of the Technical
University of Crete.



Anastasios Papadakis

Executive Chef
& President of
Chef's Club of Crete



**Archimandrite
Amvrosios Skarvelis**

Abbot of the
Monastery of Toplou
- Sitia



Petros Marinakis

Entrepreneur
Founder & Director of
the Botanical Garden
of Crete



Nikos Miliarakis

Winemaker &
President of the Board
of the Wines of Crete
cluster/network



George Baourakis

Director - Mediterranean
Agronomic Institute of
Chania CIHEAM MAICH



Matthaios Frantzeskakis

President of the Cultural Organization
of Crete & Director of the Chania Film
Festival & Coordinator of the actions:
«Cretan Diet Routes», «Villages with
lights on», «The oral history of Crete»



Constantine Manasakis

Economist, Associate Professor,
University of Crete

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE



Stergios Pirintsos

Professor of Systematic Botany & Plant Ecology, Department of Biology at University of Crete. Professor with scientific responsibility for the Botanical Garden of the University of Crete.



Vassilios Raikos

Associate Professor Hellenic Mediterranean University (HMU) Department of Nutrition and Dietetics Sciences Tripitos 72300 Sitia



John Vontas

Director of the Institute Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, Foundation for Research and Technology (IMBB/FORTH) and Professor Agricultural University of Athens

SIGNATORY STAKEHOLDERS TO THE CANDIDACY OF CRETE FOR EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY

IGCAT - International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism
Agronutritional Cooperation of the Region of Crete
Educational Development Company PLOIGOS
Faculty of Nutrition & Dietetics, Hellenic Mediterranean University
Sitia Municipality
Agricultural Cooperative of Rethymno
Cretan Women in Business Association
Heraklio Hoteliers Association



Katerina Moniaki

Archaeologist-
Archaeobotanist



Giorgos Nikolakakis

Associate Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Crete



George Papamichail

Director of the Science & Technology Park of Crete (STEP-C)



Aris Tsantiropoulos

Associate Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Crete, Department of Sociology.



The future of Cretan gastronomy hinges on a delicate balance between tradition and innovation. Time-honoured Cretan dishes and local practices endure, yet the region is committed to ensuring sustainability. This entails continued use of local and seasonal ingredients, support for small-scale agriculture, and preservation of traditional food preparation methods. It also involves educating future generations about the importance of these practices and encouraging them to carry on the culinary traditions of their ancestors. Technology can play a role in the future of Cretan gastronomy. Digital platforms can promote traditional Cretan dishes and connect consumers with local producers. Social media can be utilised to share recipes and cooking tips, while online marketplaces can support small-scale farmers and producers. By embracing new ideas while preserving cultural heritage and sustainability, Cretan cuisine can continue to thrive for generations to come.

Sustainability in gastronomy tourism in Crete involves promoting practices that contribute to the economic, social, and environmental prosperity of the region. Several key aspects have been considered by local association, institutions and independent initiatives:

GRAPHIC SCHEME

- **Local Sourcing and Farm-to-Table Practices:**
 - Encourage restaurants and food establishments to source ingredients locally, supporting local farmers and producers.
 - Promote the use of traditional, seasonal, and indigenous products in culinary offerings.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:**
 - Support initiatives that focus on preserving the biodiversity of Crete's ecosystems, including its agricultural and natural landscapes.
 - Promote sustainable fishing practices to protect marine resources.
- **Waste Reduction and Recycling:**
 - Implement waste reduction strategies in restaurants and food-related businesses, such as composting organic waste and recycling materials.
 - Encourage the use of sustainable packaging and utensils to minimize environmental impact.

- **Energy Efficiency:**
 - Promote the use of energy-efficient appliances and practices in kitchens to reduce energy consumption.
 - Support restaurants and accommodations that use renewable energy sources.
- **Certifications and Standards:**
 - Encourage restaurants and tourism-related businesses to obtain certifications such as Green Key or other sustainable tourism certifications.
 - Establish and enforce standards for sustainable gastronomy practices.
- **Cultural Heritage Preservation:**
 - Highlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage related to food and gastronomy.
 - Support initiatives that showcase the cultural significance of Cretan cuisine and its role in the local identity.
- **Culinary Education and Preservation of Traditional Techniques:**
 - Offer culinary workshops and programs that educate tourists about Cretan cuisine, its history, and traditional cooking methods.
 - Support initiatives that aim to preserve traditional recipes and culinary techniques unique to Crete.
- **Community Engagement and Inclusivity:**
 - Involve local communities in gastronomy tourism initiatives, ensuring that the benefits are shared with the broader population.
 - Encourage cultural exchange programs between locals and tourists to foster mutual understanding and appreciation.
- **Promotion of Responsible Tourism:**
 - Advocate for responsible tourism practices among visitors, emphasizing the importance of respecting local cultures and environments.
 - Promote low-impact tourism experiences that showcase the beauty of Crete without causing harm to its ecosystems.
- **Collaboration and Networking:**
 - Foster collaboration between local businesses, government agencies, NGOs, and the tourism industry to create a unified approach to sustainable gastronomy tourism.
 - Establish networks that share best practices and support each other in implementing sustainable initiatives.

LOCATION OF
FESTIVAL AND EVENTS

Cretans have a longstanding affinity for arts and events that enable them to connect with their social environment and share their emotions. On summer nights, various cities on the island host art exhibitions and festivals featuring theatre, music, film, and dance. Concerts are held in stadiums, archaeological sites, on the Venetian walls of Heraklion and Chania, or in small theatres in rural areas. Religious celebrations are always accompanied by Cretan music and dance in village squares or near churches, reviving customs from Minoan ages. The Region of Crete provides financial support for significant festivals and celebrations on the island, often participating as a co-organiser. Notable festivals and events organised by municipalities and supported by the region of Crete include:

1. Heraklion Gastronomy Days

Heraklion, UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy

2. Cretan Street Cooking Food

Agios Nikolaos

3. Olive Oil Festival

Achladia, Sitia

4. Xigalo Feast

Chamezi, Sitia

5. Cretan Nutrition Fest

Rethimno

6. Land of Mylopotamos

Perama village, Mylopotamos

7. Earth Festival

Chania

8. Amari Green Festival

Amari area villages

9. Taste & Art Festival

Kissamos

10. Cretan Food Culture

The institution is implemented every year in a different area of the Cretan countryside

These celebrations and gastronomy events are often centred around locally produced products that characterise the area, such as:

Citron Festival (Garazo, Rethimno)

Honey Festival (Drakona, Chania)

Raki Festival (Heraklion)

Olive Oil and Olive Tree Festival (Kolimvari, Chania)

Shepherd’s and Cheese Festival (Zoniana, Rethimno)

Sfakia Pie Festival (Sfakia)

Eftazimo Bread Festival (Kroustas, Lasithiou)

Eftazimo Bread Festival (Kastamonitsa, Heraklion)

Potato Festival (Tzermiado, Lasithiou)

Wine Festival (Dafnes, Heraklion)

Mizithra Pie Festival (Kritsa, Lasithiou)

Fish Festival (Souda, Chania)

Zucchini Festival (Avrakonte, Lasithiou)

Stafdoelia Festival (Marathos)

Carob Festival (Pines, Lasithiou)

Cherry Festival (Gerakari, Amariou)

Trahanas Festival (Alatsata, Heraklion)

Meatpie Festival (Meskla, Chania)

Watermelon Festival (Charakas, Heraklion)

Nut Festival (Gonies, Pediados)

Grape Festival (Asimi, Heraklion)

Sardin Festival (Chania)

Chestnut Festival (Chania)

Custom of Klidonas (Armeni, Sitias)

Choclios Festival (Paraspori, Sitias)

Corn Festival (Piscokefalo, Sitias)

Myzithropita Festival (Palekastro, Sitias)

Traditional “Kazanemata” (Chamezi, Sitias)

Kommatas Festival (Exo Mouliana, Sitias)

Feast of Figs (Sikia, Sitias)

Pie Festival (Episkopi, Heraklion)

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BUDGET
AND ACTION PLAN

Division of responsibilities at the territorial level and drafting of the quality criteria required to be part of the project (companies, events, municipalities, etc.) - JANUARY APRIL 2024

1.1 Creation of quality criteria requirements for obtaining the CERG label and launch of the campaign to become Ambassador CERG, Supporter CERG, Area Coordinator, Affiliated restaurant/winery/agritourism facility upon subscription to the values card/list of the requirements School/Training Institute or University

1.2 Launch of an idea competition to incorporate CERG into new and existing events with innovative formulas addressing challenges indicated by IGCAT: elimination of single-use plastics, food waste, healthy eating for teenagers, better quality and sustainable tourism, better capacity for the use of international languages, and storytelling - May 2024

PARTICIPATION INTO THE PLATFORM MEETING OF IGCAT

2.1 Brand dissemination events in different areas of Crete - Summer to Autumn 2024
With the help of ambassadors, coordinators, and supporters, and the organizations that have already shown interest, we will organise meetings to gather new proposals and nominations for initiatives and events to be scheduled.

2.2 Meetings with school principals and university contacts for the integration of specific activities promoting CERG and its values into school and university calendars (pilot actions or support scheduled actions). In this case, activities related to the IGCAT challenges: elimination of single-use plastics, food waste, healthy eating for teenagers, better quality and sustainable tourism, better capacity for the use of international languages, and storytelling

PARTICIPATION IN FOOD CREATIVE GIFT AWARD

- 2.3 Meetings with public stakeholders related to major events
- 2.4 Agreement with archaeological sites and museums with a close relationship with agri-food production
- 2.5 Planning small-scale environmental campaigns in collaboration with relevant entities to create pilots for replication throughout the region (e.g., plastic collection in a municipality, cleaning of an archaeological or monumental site)

PROMOTION ACTIVITIES ABROAD

- 3.1 Cultural
 - 3.1.1 Involvement of institutions/associations part of international networks (e.g., UNESCO Sites Association, Cultural Itineraries, Paths) to gain visibility at their international meetings
- 3.2 Commercial
 - 3.2.1 Participation in agri-food sector trade fairs with adequate communication and support from public and private stakeholders
- 3.3 Touristic
 - 3.3.1 Agreement for the participation of 3 foreign influencers in major scheduled events with adequate territorial distribution
 - 3.3.2 Possibility of being present with informational material or a CERG corner at all sector fairs

PROMOTION ACTIVITIES NATIONALLY

- 4.1 Cultural
 - 4.1.1 Involvement of institutions/associations part of regional and national networks for presence during major events
- 4.2 Commercial
 - 4.2.1 Campaign to promote the use of local products in HORECA

- 4.2.2 Corners in supermarkets
- 4.2.3 CERG labelling on some symbolic products

- 4.3 Touristic
 - 4.3.1 Targeted summer promotions in tourist flow transit areas/agreement with a rent-a-car company
 - 4.3.2 Possibility of being present with informational material or a CERG corner at all sector fairs
 - 4.3.3 Cross-communication on the website and social media of tourism promotion entities using the same claims

IMPLEMENTATION OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE COMMUNICATION RELATED TO THE ACTION PLAN

- 5.1 Creation of an online calendar with an integrated map of Crete symbolising project values and the values of democracy and sharing: each group member can enter events and activities and geoposition them (they will be visible online after approval by the site moderator). Events will be for 2024 and 2025, and each event will correspond to social media visibility. While for 2026 we will reproduce the same scheme adding also

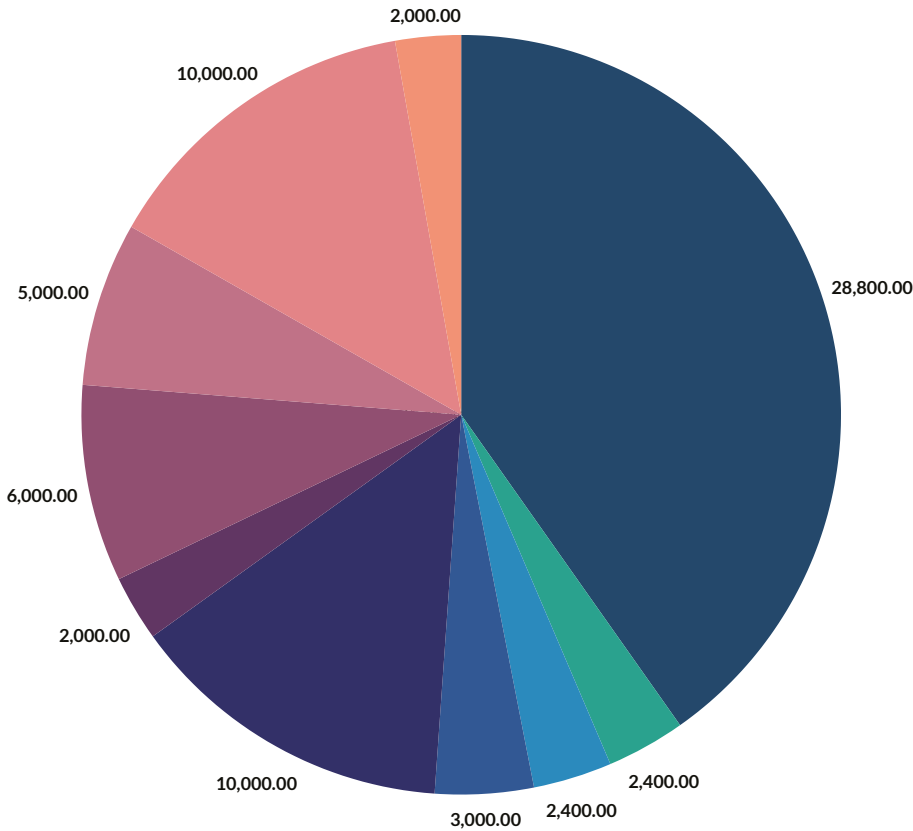
LOCAL EDITION OF EYCA

LOCAL EDITION OF CREATIVE GIFT AWARD

PLATFORM MEETING

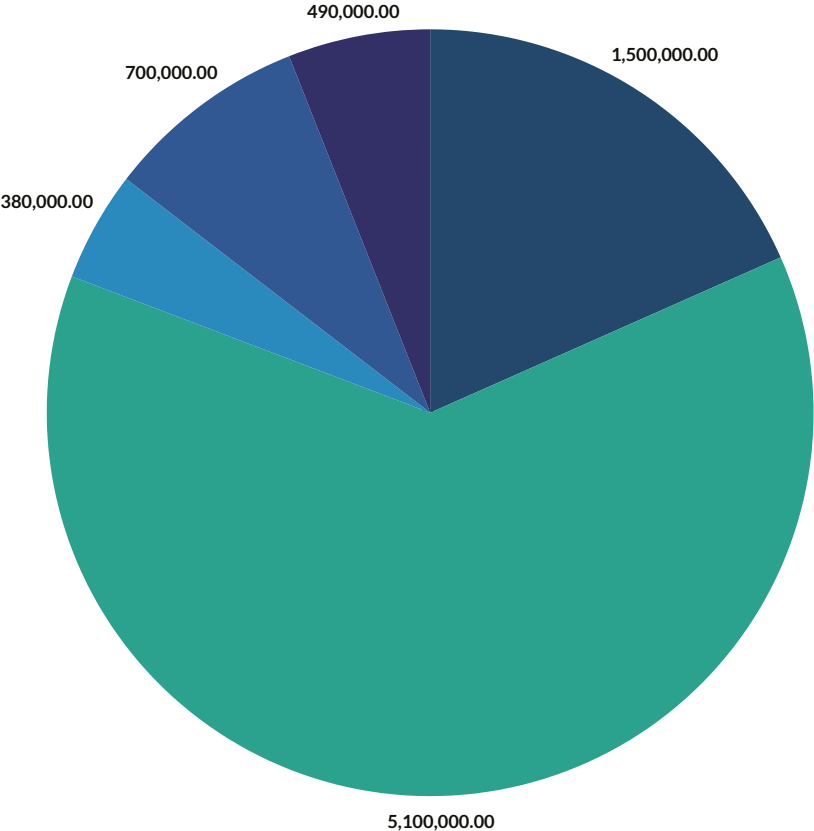
BUDGET 2024-2025:
71,600.00

- Trips for attending all platform events: 2 people per event, totalling 12 trips
- Trips for attending the European Young Chef competition (chef + accompanying person)
- Trips for attending the Creative Gift Award (1 to 3 company representatives)
- Development of the Crete ERG 2026 website
- Social media management
- Translation of bid book into Greek
- Printing bid book in 2 languages
- Printing advertising materials
- Hosting the jury visit: 6 people for 5 days (including flights)
- Certification ceremony



BUDGET 2026:
8,170,000.00

- Marketing & Communications
- Programme Implementation
- International Co-operation & Partnerships
- Citizen & SME Engagement
- Management & Administration



The 2026 budget primarily focuses on events, research initiatives, documentation, education, promotion, and development of Cretan Nutrition and Cuisine, which are already in progress and will continue until at least 2026. Additionally, new related initiatives will be exclusively developed within the framework of the European Gastronomy Region title.

Many thanks to all collaborators, stakeholders, ambassadors and scientific committee members for their valuable contribution and support in the development of the content and the visual material of this bid book.

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EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY
CRETE CANDIDATE 2026