

Greek food and top ten greek dishes

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Greek food certainly goes to show that freshness is key. No need for complicated recipes and tons of spices when all you could do is just put the right amount of everything and select the freshest ingredients. Ripe tomatoes, savoury honey, juicy meat, fresh herbs and rich olive oil are just some of the staples of Greek cuisine.

And the other good news is that Greeks usually serve all dishes at once so you will get to enjoy these harmonious flavours altogether. Plus, there's always some extra dessert on the chef's at the end of every meal. Is Greece a foodie heaven?

Top ten Greek dishes to be convinced that the answer's a big yes.

1. Meze

Greek meze are the local version of appetizers and they're as diverse as they are tasty. Lots of mezze have the same core ingredients, among which are commonly found yoghurt, garlic and a range of vegetables, whether raw or fried, but none of them tastes the same.

Tzatziki is one of the most recognizable Greek appetizers worldwide but give a try to the mellow zucchini balls or the garlicky flavour of skordalia to expand your mezze horizon. Don't feel guilty about asking for more bread either, as either pita or psomi will be on your table no matter what.

Where: Head straight for the quaint village of Pikoulia after you've climbed the Byzantine ghost town of Mystras to get some creamy tzatziki at the local Taverna Pikoulia. In a mood for some mild zucchini balls? Stop by the Bebelis Tavern in the coastal town of Galaxidi.

2. Souvlaki

If you were looking for the national street food you just cannot get enough of, you've probably found it. Yes, souvlaki are only meat skewers, but wait until you get to taste them to know how perfectly cooked and seasoned these pieces of meat are.

Pork, chicken, kebab, they come in different shapes but all taste delicious. For the next level of awesome, wrap everything in a pita with some tzatziki sauce, tomatoes and French fries, and you got the souvlaki pita. Or, for some variation, you can also try the gyros pita with meat cooked on a rotisserie.

Where: The staff at Elvis know how to grill their souvlaki and how to season their fries, and even though the street of Athens where this small joint is located might not inspire you, it is well worth the detour. Check out the Korali Café in Gefyra too, for a stunning view on the rock of Monemvasia and superb gyros pita to go along.

3. Moussaka

If layers of mince beef, smooth eggplants, béchamel and tomato sauce do not describe one of the most perfect comfort food, then what does? Sure, you could probably add some grilled cheese on top of it, but that's probably just our French side talking. Still, moussaka is one dish you will find at every tavern worth its salt and one whose blend of flavours never ceases to surprise.

Where: For some of the kindest, diligent service and home-made moussaka made with love, walk away from the tourist restaurants near the ancient site

of Corinth and head to the unassuming Tassos Taverna near the Muslim Monastaty.

4. Greek salad

Take all the best Greek vegetables plus olives and capers, add some fresh oregano and a block of feta on top of it, and then pour some olive oil for the final touch. Here you have the ultimate summer salad. Cucumbers, tomatoes and feta blend and melt in the mouth admirably and you won't even feel guilty as you've mostly eaten vegetables. And a certain amount of rich olive oil. And dairy. But it isn't any worse than the souvlaki, that's for sure!

Where: If you dream of a table with a view on the sea and on the temple of Apollo, go no further than the Ilias Tavern at Cape Sounio. Your Greek salad will sure be unforgettable.

5. Feta

Feta is the queen of all Greek cheese and for a simple reason. It tastes as good served cold or grilled. Even if you don't like cheese in general and especially if the last time you ate feta, it came out of a cheap plastic container from your local supermarket, just close your eyes and get some.

It's actually surprising to find out what feta cheese really tastes like, and rather sad to leave Greece and realize real feta has nothing to do with what you can find home. That's all the more reasons to make the most of this amazing cheese in all the ways you can imagine: grilled with hot peppers and tomatoes, saganaki style with some shrimps, drowning in honey in a crusty dough, or just fresh on top of a salad.

Where: Crispy dough filled with locally produced feta and honey awaits at To Omorfo Tavernaki in Nafplio. When a restaurant is as popular with locals as it is with tourists and cats alike, it must mean something.

6. Seafood

Greece is a country of both mountains and sea, and wherever you will be, the soothing sound of waves will never be too far. It is also a land of sailors and fishermen, who happen to catch some of the freshest fish and seafood and bring it back straight on your table. Many restaurants are supplied directly by local fishermen, whose boats you can usually see nearby, and it shows. You can taste a variety of different fish, from cod to sardines, but also fresh octopus and shrimps, grilled to perfection with lemon and olive oil.

Where: For one memorable grilled octopus on a cosy terrace facing the sea, check out Akrogiali in Gefyra. The price of the seafood will blow your mind too, and in a good way!

7. Spanakopita

Greeks love their pies, and they have a lot to choose from. Our favourite was the classic spanakopita, aka a crispy pie filled with spinach, feta and a mix of fresh herbs, such as dill, parsley and fennel. Most bakeries all over the country sell this tasty pie and it's the perfect snack for a cheap yet filling lunch break. Some sell it in the shape of a triangle, others shape it like a rectangle, and it never tastes the same twice.

Where: BBL Bakery in Athens doesn't mess with the good stuff and certainly not with the size of their spinach pies, as one will be more than enough for lunch.

8. Stuffed vegetables

Another staple of the Greek tavern menu, stuffed vegetables are a veggie option that can please vegetarians and meat lovers alike. Just like many other Greek dishes, it can be found in other neighbouring countries such as Bulgaria but it represents the essence of the Greek cuisine. Ripe peppers and tomatoes are filled with rice that melts in the mouth and cooked in an oven with a blend of fresh herbs and spices, and they taste exactly as good as you can imagine.

Where: At the feet of the Meteora Monasteries lies the village of Kastraki, which hides a great spot for some simple family cuisine at the Guest House Plakias, and especially for stuffed peppers.

9. Dolmades

Known as the local version of the vine leaves so commonly found across the Mediterranean, the dolmades know how to showcase their differences anyway. First, they're warm. Second, they're covered in an egg-lemon sauce, the avgolemono, which invigorates the flavour of the leaves and of their filling. In some restaurants, you'll find the dolmades in the appetizers' section but as there can be up to four or five vine leaves in one plate, it can be wise to order them as your main dish.

Where: Mezedopoleio o Noulis, in a narrow street of Nafplio's old town, is always busy but it's worth waiting your turn to get a taste of the home-made dolmades and locally fished seafood.

10. Sweets

No Greek foodie list can be complete without traditional sweets, ranging from smooth yoghurt with honey and nuts to baklavas, drowning in their sea of sugar and honey. If you've travelled in the Middle East, you'll be familiar with the tastes of the local sweets' scene. Greeks found a way to cook their desserts with a twist anyway, making them essentially Hellenic and involving a lot of honey, dough and cinnamon. There is also a number of cakes that restaurant owners will be glad to offer you on the house at the end of your meal.

Where: The Kentrikon Café in Nafplio won't fail to deliver on some of the best sugar and cinnamon loukoumades of your whole trip.