

Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries

By Aurelia Smeltz

A delectable way to discover Crete and its distinctive cuisine is by participating in one of the finest programs offered for food-culture enthusiasts and students alike: Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries (CCS). CCS offers a variety of annual seminars on Cretan cuisine and culture, conducted in Crete's rural communities, at historic sites, and on organic farms in mountain regions not usually visited by tourists.

These seminars are unique not only on Crete, but in the international culinary scene because of their intensity of purpose. CCS was founded in 1997 by Nikki Rose, a Greek American professional chef, graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, writer, and culinary seminar director. She is also a responsible travel adviser for projects in Brazil, Cambodia, Europe, and the USA.

These unique seminars have changed the lives of participants by enriching their understanding of how the preservation of culinary traditions actually protects precious food sources; this is called "sustainable practices." The seminars have also contributed in very significant ways to preserving and protecting Crete's precious cultural and natural heritage.

These are ambitious goals and outstanding accomplishments. On the one hand, Ms. Rose has recruited a team of experts in the international culinary and nutrition field as teachers in her seminars and, on the other hand, has gathered Crete's organic farmers, winemakers, chefs, home cooks, gardeners, fishers, and artisan food producers to be integral participants. Those enrolled in her seminars—the general public,



professionals or college students who earn credits--go to the organic farmers, the home cooks and the fishers to learn from them in their own environments.

The seminars change annually, but here are examples of past events that have been very popular:

Celebration of Crete's Biodiversity and Historic Food and Wine Routes.

For the general public, this seminar offers a mix of healthful eating and outdoor activity in regions of Crete, where many residents live to be a hundred years of age or more. Participants traverse hillside trails, observe wild thyme, sage, and oregano, and experience local wine-making festivals.

Before the evening meal, there is a trip to the fishing docks, organic farm or markets to select the food that will be prepared and enjoyed

with villagers. The evening usually ends with entertainment by local musicians playing the Cretan lyre and other instruments.

Study Abroad—The Mediterranean Diet and Lifestyle--for university students and professionals.

This is a two-week, accredited course offered in the town of Heraklion, several traditional villages on Crete and also in Athens. Students study different aspects of the Mediterranean diet through activity-related experiences, including visits to archaeological sites, organic food markets, farms, traditional tavernas, and olive oil factories.

Students participate in interactive cooking demonstrations by expert chefs and occasionally harvest and shop for ingredients for their meals. The courses are taught by Ms. Rose and nutritional experts from various universities. Students are housed in

locally-owned lodges, some of which are featured in National Geographic for best practices in sustainable tourism.

Students learn about research that has been conducted on changes in lifestyle that have occurred because of the Mediterranean Diet. They go on guided botanical hikes to learn about native vegetation incorporated into the diet and the importance of conservation initiatives to protect Crete's biodiversity.

This is a culinary and cultural immersion course emphasizing sustainable tourism, organic and biodynamic farming, olive oil production and viticulture. It is perfect for students in Culinary Arts, Culinary Sciences, Hospitality, and Nutrition. Participants learn about the cuisine of Crete, which is the basis for the healthful Mediterranean Diet, along with other aspects of the culture, such as history, music and dance.

CCS also organizes private group workshops/accredited continuing education programs for professionals in the healthcare and hospitality industries. These intensive workshops focus on the interrelationship between our safe and good food sources, cultural-agricultural heritage, human health and the health of our environment.

How to Register for CCS Programs:
www.cookingincrete.com
info@cookingincrete.com
USA Telephone: 202.422.4635
For private tailored programs, academic study tours or professional workshops:
Contact Andreas Spiridakis,
CCS Program Coordinator
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Recipes from Chef Nikki Rose's Book

Crete: The Roots of the Mediterranean Diet
© Nikki Rose 2011

We eat a lot of beans in Crete. Some varieties are made into fritters (chickpeas and split yellow peas) and added to a long list of vegetable or meat dishes. Some are mashed and served as a dip along with other meze items. We also use chickpea

flour for rustic breads. I like beans as the star of a salad. Certain beans make ideal medleys with certain herbs. For instance, black-eyed peas with fresh dill is a fantastic combination. Lentils have a very robust flavor, so they hold up to

powerful seasonings and garlic. Plan to make bean salads about an hour before serving (or overnight) to let the flavors meld. Bean salads will keep under refrigeration for 3 days.

CookinginCrete.com



Black-Eyed Pea Salad

Serves 4-6 people as part of meze

- 2 cups cooked black-eyed peas
- 1 small onion, diced (purple onions work great for this)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1tbsp fresh dill, chopped
- 1 small chili pepper, minced or a pinch of dried red pepper flakes
- 2tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1tsp white wine vinegar
- a pinch of salt and black pepper

Mix all ingredients together, marinate in the refrigerator for at least an hour before serving.

Kali Orexi!

Fresh String Bean Salad

Some of my favorite meals have been created out of sheer laziness or lack of time. I like to find ways to retain individual flavors of vegetables I'm privileged to acquire straight off the plant. One-pot dishes are great but flavors can be lost due to high heat or overcooking. I want to eat good food even though I'm just as busy as everyone else. Chefs need breaks from the office too. My neighbor, Eleni, is a professional organic farmer. She gave me a sack of gorgeous string beans. I could have prepared them in the traditional Greek way – braised with aromatics. But they were so precious, I tried something different.



- 1 pound string beans, strings removed, of course
- 2tbsp extra virgin organic olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp high-quality dried oregano
- ½tsp sea salt
- freshly cracked black pepper

Fill a stockpot with ½ inch of water. Bring to a boil. Add beans, lower heat and simmer until tender (about 5mins). Drain and reserve. Return the pot to low heat and gently cook garlic in olive oil for 2mins just to take the raw edge off. Remove from heat. Add beans and remaining ingredients. Tastes great warm or at room temperature.

PHOTOS ARE COURTESY OF CHEF NIKKI ROSE FOR RECIPES