

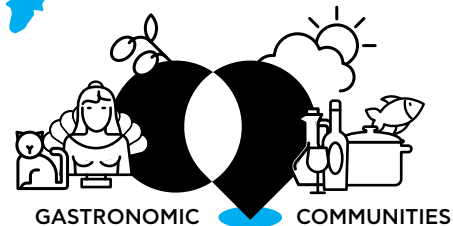
KYTHERA



GASTRO NOMY & WINETOURLISM



KYTHERA



This gastronomic guide, The Gastronomic Community of Kythera, is aimed at promoting the Gastronomic Wealth of the Municipality of Kythera and was created within the framework of the Interlocal Cooperation Plan, **Selected Tastes of Greece II: Greek gastronomic culture, of the CLLD/LEADER Programme 2014-2020.**

Local professionals from the wider field of gastronomy (the agricultural sector, processing, restaurants, hospitality) formed a network, collaborating to found the **Gastronomic Community of the Municipality of Kythera**, with a common vision the collection of information about the local gastronomic scene, with a view to linking Tourism with the Gastronomic Wealth of the area and promoting the Municipality of Kythera as a destination for those interested in good food and wine.

This document was compiled by Cooperation Network of Municipalities of the Regional Unit of Attica Islands, within the framework of the Interlocal Cooperation Plan, Selected Tastes of Greece II: Greek gastronomic culture, sub measure 19.3 of the Local Programme CLLD/LEADER 2014-2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Kythera, Aphrodite's Island
- 6 The History of Kythera
- 8 Kythera as a symbol and inspiration for artists
- 10 Kythera's Interior
- 12 Kythera's Beaches
- 14 Landscape Agriculture
- 16 The Wines of Kythera
- 18 The Cuisine of Kythera
- 20 Dishes of Kythera
- 22 Kythera's Tavernas
- 24 Sightseeing
- 26 Souvenirs





KYTHERA, APHRODITE'S ISLAND

The myth that Kythera was the birthplace of Aphrodite (Venus) played a leading role in the island's history. As Hesiod related in his *Theogony*, Aphrodite rose fully formed from the sea foam off Kythera when the Titan Cronos castrated his father Uranus and his severed genitals fell into the Aegean. The waves then took the goddess to Paphos on Cyprus, where she was also worshipped as the island's protectress.

The emergence of the goddess from the sea off Kythera was an attempt by the ancients – according to experts in palaeontology – to interpret the emergence of the island from the sea, a fact that is

confirmed by the large number of ancient finds that originated in sea life, in broad swathes of the island, at Mitata and Viaradika.

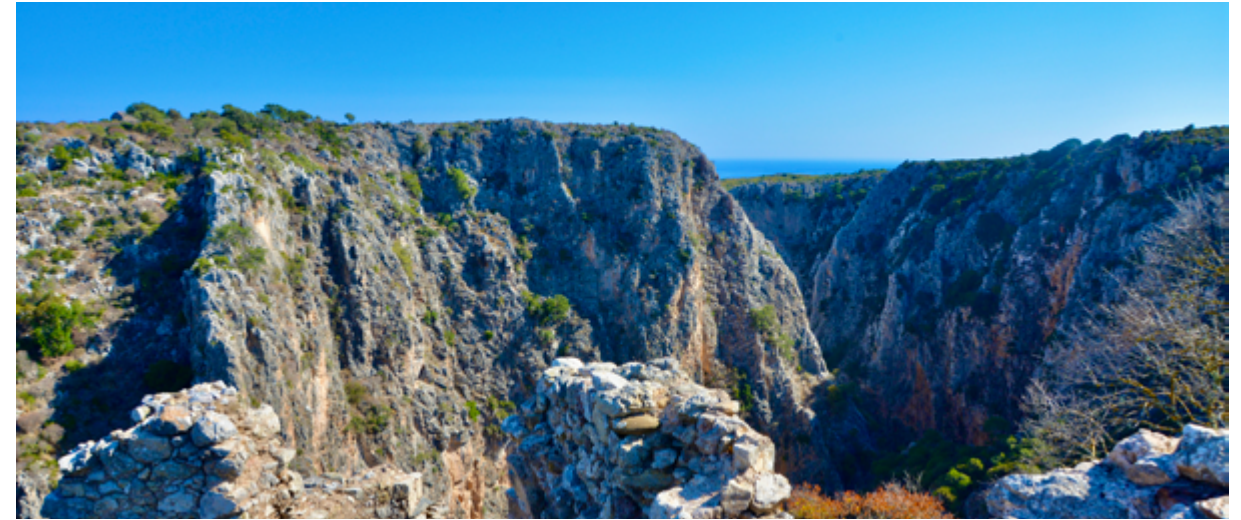
Aphrodite's birth would determine the future of the island, as least insofar as myth is concerned, as it would function as a symbolic place inspiring generations of artists.

Kythera, the seventh island in the Ionian cluster, is not even in the Ionian Sea. Located between Neapolis (in the east 'finger' of the Peloponnese) and Crete, it became part of the chain, called in Greek 'the Seven Islands', when the Venetians and then the British included it for administrative convenience.

Nowadays its administration falls under Piraeus and Attica. Oblong in shape, Greece's 15th largest island is 29 km long and 18 km at its widest, with 64 settlements. The Moudari lighthouse, constructed by the British in 1857, stands at its northern tip, while at the port of Kapsali in the south there is another one, built in 1853.

with brooks and streams that run down to the sea, picturesque hamlets with stone-built houses that could be in the Veneto, impressive ruined castles and enchanting beaches. Be prepared to do some walking to get to some of them.

Kythera, with its mythical past that was preserved by travellers of the 17th and 18th century as well as



Kythera's appearance is varied: the south is reminiscent of the Cyclades, in the middle its large mountain range looks like the interior of Crete, and for quite a distance as you drive through the island from north to south, you don't see the sea at all. The northern area, however, could be in the Ionian, it is so lush and green.

In general, Kythera has a wild, eerie beauty, thanks in part to the dozens of deserted villages, abandoned during the 20th century when large segments of the population emigrated en masse. Its charm is not immediate but a little time and effort will reward you with its secrets. As you drive past terraced hillsides that used to be intensively cultivated, you will encounter little gardens, gorges and hidden valleys

the poets and artists who created beautiful works inspired by a place they had never seen – think of Botticelli's 'Venus on the Half-Shell' – also had more than its share of suffering. Today, the victim of pirate raids and mass migration is searching for its identity.

In the minds of 21st century people, Kythera, helped by its past, continues to be a dream world. Symbolically, it continues to be a destination for romantics and those who believe that utopias can be real. Contemporary Kythera, with all the weight of the myths and symbolism it carries, is ready to take the step to attract dreamers from all over the world with its low-key, tasteful tourist development and to ensure they won't be disappointed.



THE HISTORY OF KYTHERA

The first traces of human habitation on the island date to 3800 BC, while two thousand years after that the Minoans colonised it, using Kythera as a bridge to the Peloponnese, emulating the Phoenicians who had established a trading post there en route to other colonies. During the 12th century BC, the Dorians occupied it, and, in the *Iliad*, Homer mentions two heroes from Kythera, Lykophron and Amfidamas. He also states that Paris and Helen spent their first days (and nights) together on Kythera, while in the *Odyssey* he relates that after a storm at Cape Malea, Odysseus drifted south to Kythera.

The strategic position of the island was recognised by both the Spartans and the Athenians, who fought to

occupy it. After they succumbed to the Macedonians, Kythera declined but continued to be inhabited.

In 375 AD, St. Helen, mother of Constantine the Great, took refuge in semi-deserted Kythera to live in solitude as a nun, and twenty years later it became part of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Arabs occupied it for a while but by 700 it appears to have been deserted. In the 10th century, new settlers came in waves from Monemvasia and founded the capital, Palaiohora, building its castle. They controlled Kythera until 1204, when the Crusaders led by a vengeful Doge conquered Constantinople and the Venetians and other knights from Catholic Europe took over the Aegean and Ionian islands as well as most of mainland

Greece. Many Phanariots (prominent Greeks from Constantinople) found refuge on Kythera and in the 17th century the island welcomed many Cretans fleeing the Ottomans. After the Turkish conquest of Cyprus (1571) and especially Crete (1669), Kythera remained a military outpost of the Venetians until Napoleon put an end to the Serene Republic in 1797. Indeed, the Venetians thought of the island, which they called Cerigo, as their 'eye' on the Aegean. Under the Venetians, Kythera flourished as a trading station despite repeated pirate raids, and by the end of their reign, it boasted about 7,500 inhabitants.

After the demise of the Serene Republic, the French occupied Kythera and introduced a democratic regime, holding a special ceremony in which they set fire to the *Libro d'Oro*, the Venetian equivalent of *Burke's Peerage*, and declared all citizens to have equal rights. But not for long, because soon afterwards, the Russians allied with the Ottomans, took over the Ionian Islands, enraging the peasants, who rose up and killed some of the most powerful noblemen. A period of anarchy followed. All this within the first fifteen years of the 19th century.

For in 1815, with the defeat of Napoleon, England took over all the Ionian Islands and started a building programme. Among their works, which

can still be seen, were the roads connecting the villages, impressive stone bridges, aqueducts, the English school and the lighthouses. Ironically, the growth in population pushed many Kytherans to emigrate to Smyrna (now Izmir) and the US.

Kythera, with the other Ionian Islands, was united with Greece on 28 May 1864. The dominant theme on the island in the 20th century was a steep increase in emigration, which had begun as early as the 18th century. Before the Asia Minor disaster of 1922 (when the Greek population who had lived there for millennia was either killed or resettled in Greece), 14,000 of Smyrna's inhabitants originated from Kythera, the largest percentage. After the Disaster, Kytherans emigrated to Greece (Attica, Thessaloniki, the Aegean islands), Egypt, and then Australia or America; very few returned to Kythera. In fact, Australia acquired the nickname, Big Kythera. The tendency continued after the Second World War, leaving the island virtually deserted. But by the late 1970s, people were moving to Athens and Piraeus rather than abroad. Tourists did not begin discovering the island until the 90s. And now it boasts a considerable number of resident expats from all over the world, attracted by its beauty and remoteness.



KYTHERA AS A SYMBOL AND INSPIRATION FOR ARTISTS

Kythera, in myth and in reality, has been a timeless source of artistic inspiration and a popular subject for generations of artists. The birth of the goddess of love on Kythera, according to Hesiod's mythology, would define the future of the island, at least in terms of art and literature as it functioned as a symbolic place, inspiring major artists to create outstanding works. How could Hesiod have imagined when he wrote his epic *Theogony* (ca 700 BC) and described the birth of Aphrodite on Kythera, that his tale would inspire the sculptors of ancient Greece to create such unique works as the Venus de Milo, and two millennia later to induce artists during the Renaissance, Reformation and our own era to depict this little island as an ideal place, an earthly paradise?

And how truly, with such power and imagination could such figures as Botticelli, Watteau, Baudelaire and the Greek film director, Theo Angelopoulos, have created such major works about an island they had never laid eyes on? Naturally, they were guided by Aphrodite, the goddess of love in its highest form, which is of course the driving force behind the creation of dreamlike images of romantic love, optimism and yearning for a kinder world.

'The Birth of Venus' by the Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) was painted around 1485-1486 and is considered one of his finest works. In it he captures the moment when Aphrodite is born, rising from the waves fully formed and supported by a large shell. The naked body of the goddess is a hymn to classical beauty and purity of spirit, and it was

very daring for an era when most paintings depicted ecclesiastical subjects, and which in our own times have had a strong influence on modern films and books.

The French artist Jean Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), presented his great painting, 'Embarkation for Kythera', at the French Academy of Fine Arts in 1717, prompting the Academy to create a new genre of art depicting 'fêtes galantes' or outdoor celebrations. His subject is a synthesis of the landscape of the Garden of Luxembourg in an erotic atmosphere of happy lovers who are embarking on a boat to sail to Kythera, the land that gave birth to ideal love. With this work the painter gave shape to a utopian idea of freedom, and the freedom that governed the up-and-coming bourgeoisie.

After Watteau, the idea that Kythera symbolized a dreamlike, distant place where love and eternal peace reigned inspired many leading figures in 18th century France, such as Victor Hugo, François Fenelon, Voltaire, Paul de Kock, Alphonse de Lamartine, as well as Goethe and others in Germany.



Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) was one of the most important poets France produced. In his work, Baudelaire attempted to marry beauty and evil, violence with sexual pleasure and to demonstrate their relationship. In his poem 'Voyage to Kythera', published in his collection *Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil) in 1857, he mocked Watteau's painting, because in his pessimistic view, Kythera existed solely in the realm of myth and as a symbol of unattainable utopias. The Greek film director Theo Angelopoulos (1935-2012), one of the great directors of all time, won many international awards for his contribution to cinema, the most important being the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998 for 'Eternity and a Day'. Films like 'The Travelling Players', 'Landscape in the Mist', 'The Suspended Step of the Stork', 'The Beekeeper', 'Alexander the Great' and 'Ulysses' Gaze' had a profound influence on other noted directors like Emir Kusturica, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Wim Wenders, and others.

His 'Voyage to Kythera' (1984) depicts the life of an elderly couple, entangled in History, who have no place to settle down. The husband, a latter-day Odysseus, returns to Greece 30 years after being exiled as a communist to find Penelope and Telemachos in his Ithaca. But since Ithaca no longer exists, husband and wife are cast adrift, hoping to reach utopian Kythera, but that might not exist either.



KYTHERA'S INTERIOR

Kythera may be known for its picturesque shores and beaches, but the interior of the island also has its charms, some even more exciting. It is a rich mix of vegetation, forests, ravines, pastures, cultivated areas, abandoned farms and villages scattered amidst them, some thriving settlements, some abandoned. Kythera is mountainous, with two main ranges, one in the east, the other in the west, separated by a flat plateau. The highest peaks in the eastern range are Digenis (alt 474 m), Agia Moni (alt 348 m) and Mermingarisi (alt 506 m). These two mountain ranges branch off into hills, amongst which there are deep ravines. Streams of bubbling water flow near Mylopotamos, Karavas and Mitata, while other districts rely on wells for their water supply.

Mylopotamos, as the name implies (potami = river), is blessed with abundant water that used to turn the watermills (myla) that ground the area's wheat into flour. Walking along it, through plane-tree filled gullies, you'll come to a waterfall and 15 minutes later the Philippi watermill, still in good condition, though the others are in ruins. If you walk 400 m from Mylopotamos, you'll come to an abandoned fortress that was built in 1565 and which contains, among other things, a Gothic style British school and Byzantine churches with some frescoes in good condition. The village square is impressive with its plane trees where visitors can sit under their thick shade and enjoy a cup of coffee or some local specialities.



One lovely excursion through cool pine trees to the heart of the plateau leads to the island's largest village, Potamos, whose traditional houses, old mansions, Venetian guard house and neoclassical nursery school are of great architectural interest. The traditional cafes, bakeries and tavernas offer wonderful local specialities. It's worth visiting Potamos on Sundays to see the farmers' market held in its flagstone square with its traditional products and the people who make and grow them.

Heading down further south, you'll come to the traditional hamlet of Aroniadika, with houses from the Middle Ages and smaller buildings in the Cycladic style with archways and courtyards brimming with bougainvillea. Stop at the delightful village coffeehouse right on the main road for a taste of delicious local sweets.

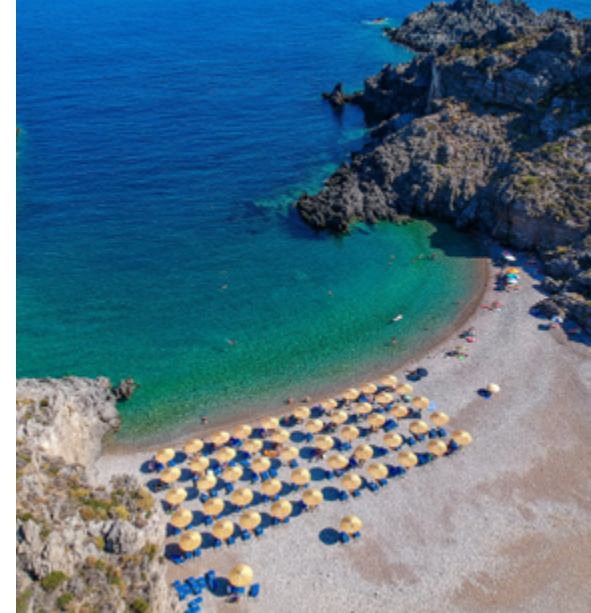
Eight kilometres from Potamos, you'll come to a stunning wild spot; this is Palaiohora, the ruined capital of Byzantine Kythera. Get out of your car and follow the track for about 1000 metres and you can get a close look at the ruins – houses and little churches, as well as the deep ravines that surround them and the remains of the walls, which did not protect the inhabitants from the fury of the notorious

pirate Barbarossa, who in 1537 ransacked the place, looting and destroying everything in sight, to the extent that the town was never lived in again. (He did the same to many other islands in the Aegean and Saronic Gulf, leaving them deserted.)

Another picturesque village is Mitata, in the exact heart of the island at an altitude of 325 metres. From its central square, which is a natural balcony, you can survey the stupendous view to the green mountains opposite, the terraced gardens with a great variety of trees and plants, and on the horizon, the sea beyond the beach of Palaioapolis. On a clear day you may even be able to see the mountain peaks of Crete.

In this square, nicknamed the balcony of Kythera – which hosts what some consider the island's best church festival – you'll find the village coffeehouse, which is also a restaurant, and the little, blue-domed church of Agia Triada (Holy Trinity), which has suffered some damage from earthquakes.

On the hilltop directly opposite sits the smaller, sparsely inhabited village of Viaradika. To get there you have to cross the Tsakonos gorge which is easily reached and conceals many rewards for the hiker, such as springs, water mills, ponds and a small post-Byzantine chapel.



KYTHERA'S BEACHES

Kythera's beaches may not be the most famous in Greece, with endless stretches of sand, bars and beach beds, but they have their own magic. Not always easy to get to, they lie between wild rocks and gorse-covered hills, most of them are small with delightful surroundings. When they are rocky, they lie on wonderful fjords as at Avlemonas, or have low troughs where the trapped water evaporates leaving the island's famed fleur de sel. Whether sandy or pebbly, they are famed for their crystalline waters. The most famous coastal villages, Diakofti, Agia Pelagia (the main port), Kapsali, apart from having organized beaches, and water sports, also possess tavernas, cafes and bars where one can sit from morning till

dusk. At Kapsali, closing times are later because this is where the heart of the island's nightlife beats. For those who prefer natural beaches, at the sandy stretch (about 500 m) of Palaipolis you will always find your own spot to sunbathe and swim. On the other hand, if you want the sea to feel like a big pool, you have only to go to the adjacent beach of Avlemonas and there you'll find it between the rocks of the Gulf of Aphrodite! The most popular and perhaps the most special of all is the beach at Kaladi, which in reality is three beaches, one next to the other, on three little bays. They are pebbly and nestled between high cliffs. On the middle beach, there's big rock that has one side in the sea and

on the other a cave that leads to the smaller beach. One reason for its beauty is that in order to reach it, you have to walk up and down 150 stone steps, which makes it inaccessible to many and keeps it 'private'. The stream that starts at Mylopotamos and cuts across the lush ravine with the ruined watermills meets the sea at Kalami at a stunning beach surrounded by high steep rocks. It's small with fine pebbles, deep crystalline waters, and its inaccessibility makes it ideal for the daring, determined nature lovers. Another beach that is almost hidden in the back of a small bay in the southwest of the island is Melidoni, which has dark thick sand and pebbles. Organized,

with umbrellas and beach beds, it is also easy to drive to. To the southeast, one next to the other and relatively near Hora and Livadi are Fyri Ammos (Kalamos) and Kombonada, which are both large, spacious and organized with parking areas, but still washed by the island's clear, azure waters. On Kythera, with its 90 kilometres of coast, the visitor has the luxury of choosing from a wide selection of beaches. From among the dozens of small beaches, organized or not, sandy or pebbly, with wild or tranquil surroundings, easy or difficult to reach, it's certain that you will find the beach of your dreams.





LANDSCAPE AGRICULTURE

Farming and animal husbandry were the main occupations of most of the islanders in earlier centuries, although Kythera is not particularly fertile and production was never abundant. Under the Venetians, farming became more intensified, and more terraces were created on the steep hillsides to increase the arable land. When the British took over, they introduced incentives for the production of more olive oil, wheat and wine.

Until the early 20th century, most of the island's arable land was under cultivation, not surprising when we think that Kythera supported 13,000-15,000 inhabitants. Records from those days show production of 735,000 kg of olive oil, 1,932,000 kg of wine, 80,000

kg of almonds, 100,000 kg of figs, 100,000 kg of potatoes, and 180,000 kg of grapes.

Today the amount of land under cultivation is minimal. Agricultural production is small but stable and of high quality, with a large and growing percentage of it organic.

Most of the acreage is given over to grains – wheat, barley, corn – and pulses – broad beans, chickpeas, lentils, vetch and lathouri for fava, while wine production has become one of the primary agricultural activities. The islanders also grow olives, carobs (which are becoming increasingly popular for bread and crackers), figs, plums, almonds and pears, Kythera's wild pear trees are especially numerous.

Long ago, the island also had small areas devoted to linseed, cotton and tobacco.

The animals raised are mainly sheep, goats and pigs, while cattle are minimal. The sheep and goat milk is used in a fine cheese available on the market. There are also several poultry farms.



Kythera's honey is its most famous product, rightly so since it is such high quality. Moreover, it has had beekeepers for millennia, since the Minoans. Thyme, the fragrant herb that bees feed on, flourishes on the

island and gives the honey its exquisite taste. But Kythera also produces a pungent honey, from the heather that flowers on its hillsides.

Kythera's extra-virgin olive oil from modern oil presses is also excellent and available at local markets. A good portion of the oil is used in the production of its famous rusks, which are among the best known in Greece and are on sale all over the country.

Apart from the olive oil, honey and rusks, which Kythera exports within Greece, you will also find several excellent products that are only sold locally. These include dairy products from fresh milk to buttermilk, butter, fresh cheeses (anthotyro, myzithra), and a hard cheese (kefalotyri). Fresh meat abounds, from veal to pork, lamb, kid, wild she goat, and chicken. Finally, Kythera produces various kinds of pasta, including noodles

and xinohondro, the Cretan type of trahana made from soured milk and cracked wheat, a wonderful addition to soups.

Other products, in varying quantities, include nuts and fruit like almonds, walnuts, bitter oranges, oranges, tangerines, apples, nectarines, five different types of pear, figs, prickly pears, and vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, courgettes, potatoes, tomatoes, aubergines, okra, cucumbers, melons, green beans, runner beans, broad beans, lathouri for fava, chickpeas, lentils, onions, peppers and a special variety of peach known as 'Aphrodite's breast'.

You can find these products and the people responsible for them at local shops and the open-air markets at Potamos (Sunday mornings) and Livadi (Wednesday afternoons).



THE WINES OF KYTHERA

Historically, Kythera was famous for its exceptional wines, part of its long heritage dating back to the Phoenicians. Those seafaring people introduced the grape to the island with which they had trade, owing to the presence there of the mollusc used in producing the rare Tyrian purple dye so prized it was reserved for royalty. From those times to our own, various travellers had nothing but praise for the fine wines of Cerigo (the Venetian name for the island). In more recent years, the largest areas given over to vineyards were in the fertile district of Palaioiopolis, which has the advantage of being sheltered and in the south part of the island. Other areas with vineyards were Kambos below Dymonas, the

district of Fratsies near Livadi, and the plain of Aroniadika-Potamos. Records from 1922 show that annual production was no greater than 150 tonnes – noting it was much lower than usual – while today it does not exceed 90 tonnes. At that time there were wineries that bottled wine and exported it in small quantities abroad, while most farmers had vineyards of varying sizes which produced their household's wine. Any wine leftover was sold locally. The grapes were pressed on the farm, either in the courtyard or inside the house! Kythera's wines are usually light to medium in body and have fruity aromas and tastes. The whites are mostly dry, while the reds can be dry or sweet. The

most common varietal is Arikaras. This is a plump, large black grape (kara means black in Turkish), which makes a fine table wine. The Arikaras grape came to Kythera from Smyrna (Izmir today) and was then called Phokianos after the district of Phocaea in Asia Minor. Red wine from the homonymos indigenous varietal is deep red in colour with an aroma of fruits and spices. Before WWII, the first grapes in circulation at the market in Piraeus were the Arikaras, which they used to call Tsirigotikos (from Kythera), since it was grown in the fertile plain of Palaioiopolis. Petrolanos is a varietal that produces white wine. It has a golden colour and an aroma of citrus fruits and white flowers. Other varietals produced on the island are Tokoumaki, Roditis, Kydonitsa and Savvatiano. They also make an excellent

tsipouro from the skins and pulp left over from the wine pressing, a firewater much beloved by the islanders. Kythera has a few small traditional wineries, some more than 150 years old, as well as two or three modern presses with stainless steel tanks that also offer wine tastings. Naturally, small producers account for most of the island wines, and they make it with particular care and flair from the different varietals. Some of them can be found at the local farmers' markets or in shops specializing in local products. Every August, a Wine Festival is held at Mitata. This is a splendid opportunity to have a good time, taste the island's wines and get to know the producers. Also, every summer at Fratsia there's an agricultural fair, which provides another chance to sample wines and meet the producers.





Almond paste (Pasta my(gda)lo)

This is a kind of marzipan and its name in Greek is a corruption of the word for almond, amygdalo. This sweet was brought to island by a Kytheran confectioner from Kontolianika in Asia Minor in the 1920s, named Emmanuel Kontoleon-Kokkinos. As a small child he was taken first to Syros and then to Smyrna. When he returned to the island, he opened his famous sweet shop in Hora and his pasta mylo became his most popular confection and a must at every celebration. This is how it is made: You place a thin layer of sweet pie dough in a baking pan and top it with almond paste made from ground blanched almonds, beaten eggs, sugar, bitter almonds, and milk and then bake it. After baking, you top it with a layer of meringue (egg whites beaten stiff with sugar). Pasta mylo is on offer in most of the island's cafes and sweet shops.



THE CUISINE OF KYTHERA

THE SWEETS OF KYTHERA

The traditional cooking of Kythera, like the island's culture in general, shows influences from both the East and the West, Crete and the Peloponnese, centuries of Venetian rule, the short French occupation, and fifty years under the British. The island was never rich in agricultural products but nor was it poor. Both the land and sea offered their bounty which the islanders transformed into interesting and diverse dishes, something even more apparent in their sweets. Many seafood recipes resemble those found in the other Ionian Islands, with their ample use of garlic and herbs in fish soups and stews. Local specialities are sea snails, limpets and crabs in a strong, spicy sauce. The preparation of some meat dishes shows a strong

Cretan influence, but can also resemble those in the other Ionians: cooked with wine, oregano, pearl onions, and again with lots of garlic and spices. One of the most characteristic is the Venetian pastitsio, an especially rich medley of ingredients and flavours, found also on Corfu. Abundant too are the seasonal greens, vegetables and pulses, which were staples of the islanders' diet for centuries, cooked simply with the local sea salt and olive oil. Because of its location, Kythera is also visited by flocks of migrating birds and hunting enriched the diet and gave housewives more ingredients to work with. The favourite foods found on Kytheran dinner tables are: Aubergines with trahana, dried broad

beans stewed with tomatoes, spinach pie, cheese pies, savoury pumpkin pie with cheese, snails with trahana, octopus in several guises – stewed, grilled, roasted – fish soup or fish baked in the oven, every kind of fish from sardines to tuna baked or stewed, chicken with noodles, veal lagoto with tomato paste and lemon juice, pork cured or roasted with oranges as in Laconia, stewed hare, stewed kid, sheep with tomato sauce are just some of the dishes you would sample if invited to a Kytheran home. Kythera's traditional sweets stand out, thanks to the use of local honey in most of the recipes, the

second most popular ingredient being almonds. The best loved sweets are: anthogalera, biscuits with cream; achladakia, crushed almonds with rose water; koumara, a bite-sized sweet; melounia, tiny mouth-watering treats made of thyme honey, almonds, flour and extra virgin olive oil; rozedes, made of honey, almonds, semolina, cinnamon and cloves, traditional sweets that will keep for months without losing their divine taste; xerotigana (fried pastry) with thin crunchy fylo, sprinkled with thyme honey, sesame seeds and cinnamon. Apart from almond paste

(similar to marzipan), which is the most popular Kytheran sweet, two other complicated but beloved sweets are boundino and pastitseto. Boudino is a Kythera pudding, something left over from British rule. It is made with fresh milk, butter, fresh eggs, semolina, sugar, raisins, crushed almonds and cinnamon. Pastitseto is a sweet with aristocratic overtones like lots of vanilla, fresh butter and quince jam.



CERIGOTIKI VRECHTOLADEA

This unusual name is the very tasty Kythera finger food that resembles the Cretan rusk salad or dakos. It's made with the light, crunchy local rusks, kneaded with olive oil, anhydrous tomatoes, fresh samphire, local goat cheese, oregano, sea salt and olive oil.



EWE STEWED WITH TOMATOES WITH PASTA

Kythera has several flocks of sheep and goats whose meat is made into delicious local recipes. One of them is this traditional dish found in many parts of Greece. Because its flesh is apt to be tough – this is no baby lamb – it was not popular in urban kitchens, but recently it has been rediscovered and won admirers. The secret is slow cooking with simple ingredients – finely chopped onion and garlic, tomatoes and tomato paste, and seasonings like bay leaf, nutmeg, fresh oregano and other spices.



KID WITH LEMON

Goats abound in Kythera, a lot of them 'free range' that roam the island at will, damaging crops and trees. Whether part of a flock or loners, they move around a lot and have a wonderful varied diet of greens, grasses and herbs that make their flesh less fatty than lamb and much more tasty. Kid is cooked in various ways, stewed or roasted. One simple recipe is this one, which calls for kid roasted in the oven with potatoes, lots of lemon juice, and sprinkled with rosemary and oregano. You'll find it in many of the island's tavernas.



VENETSIANIKO PASTITSIO

As the name implies, this is a Venetian dish, a rare recipe found on many of the Ionian islands, which may have its origins in ancient Rome. The filling consists of a medley of well-cooked meats – veal, pork, chicken, woodcock, blackbirds, sausage, lard – and thick macaroni with grated cheese and dill, which is folded between two sheets of pie dough and then baked. The result is an unbelievable feast of flavours. On Kythera, the pie is made with finely chopped liver. Nowadays, because it is so complicated, very few cooks attempt it.



DISHES OF KYTHERA



PORK WITH ORANGES

This recipe comes from Laconia, on the Peloponnese opposite. There oranges were a traditional flavouring for sausages, smoked pork and confit. Kythera did not have many pigs, but those who did have them cooked them with oranges since their acidity and sweetness reduced the meat's fattiness.

AUBERGINES WITH RUSTIC PASTA (XINOHONDRO)

This is a typical and scrumptious summer dish, which can be made either with the pungent type of trahana (xinochondro) or the more common mild one. It consists of sautéed chopped onion and garlic in oil, to which sliced aubergines are added. When they soften a bit, the cook pours in some wine, then chopped tomatoes, the pasta, parsley and some finely chopped spring onions, salt, pepper, plus 2 cups of water and simmers the contents until the sauce thickens.





KYTHERA'S TAVERNAS

Kythera's cuisine, despite the relatively small size of the island and its limited produce, was surprisingly rich since its housewives made use of everything the place had to offer, incorporating local traditions, Venetian tastes and techniques, and years spent abroad to prepare interesting and varied dishes.

Food was generally prepared in the homes rather than in restaurants, which had a very limited menu, not more than two or three dishes per day before the advent of tourism. In any case, before the 80s, there were few tavernas on the island, just one or two per village. Today you will find plenty of eateries to choose from and a large selection of dishes to sample. At the seaside tavernas, which are only open during the tourist season, you'll find fish and seafood caught or collected by local fishermen.



Big fish are usually cooked in the oven, made into soups or grilled, while the smaller ones are fried or grilled. Tuna from the open seas is made into fresh salads, and you will also be tempted by cod with garlic sauce, fried calamari, octopus stewed in wine or vinegar, grilled or made into croquettes, along with sardines and whitebait.



Among the offerings in the inland tavernas are filling salads, various pies, including tiganopsomo, a kind of fried bread often stuffed with cheese; grilled meat and meat stews, such as kid with oregano, roast chicken with potatoes, veal stewed with tomatoes and pasta, veal stew with pearl onions, roast pork with orange; and finally, the beloved dishes of spring and summer, artichokes with oil and vinegar, aubergines

with rustic pasta (xinohondro), and stuffed courgette flowers. Some tavernas have gardens and vegetable patches that provide them with fresh greens, pulses like local fava, vegetables and poultry, while others are situated in lush surroundings or have breath-taking views.



In every case, along with local recipes, when the ingredients are produced on the island, the gracious and obliging proprietors can tell their customers about



the origin of the products – e.g., which butcher makes their wonderful sausages – and answer their questions about the place and the people who live there.





THE MOUDARI LIGHTHOUSE

This lighthouse, in the northernmost tip of the island, Cape Spathi (or Sword Cape) is the largest the British erected on Greek soil. Built in 1857, it is 25 metres high. Next to the lighthouse is the flag port, where the lighthouse keeper would signal passing ships using flags. This lighthouse and the one opposite, at Cape Malia, define the passage between Kythera-Elafonisos and Neapolis which has some of the busiest cargo traffic in the Mediterranean.

AVLEMONAS

This seaside hamlet with a mere 80 inhabitants is built on the east coast of Kythera, in the northeast head of the bay of Agios Nikolaos. Its name comes from a word meaning out of sight, implying that the little port was invisible from the sea and therefore an ideal anchorage in the days of pirates. Thanks to its Cycladic-style architecture and the tiny bay, Aphrodite's Bath, where you think you're swimming in a private pool, Avlemonas is one of the island's most beautiful spots.

HORA

Kythera's main town, Hora (a generic word for island capital), lies above the south coast of the island and together

with its port, Kapsali, below it, make a most picturesque and impressive sight. It is built on the slopes of hill topped by a formidable 16th-century Venetian castle, where the locals retreated during pirate raids. Today's visitors will enjoy a superb view over the Aegean Sea as well as the beautiful town with its snow-white churches, Cycladic-style houses, narrow arched alleyways, aristocratic mansions, and flower-filled courtyards – a magical stage set at your feet.

THE SPRING OF AMIR-ALI

This is a little stream in the north of the island that flows in a lush ravine, which has water all year. Visiting it is made easy by a path next to it that is partly paved with flagstones, an ideal walking experience. According to legend, Amir Ali was the son of a Turkish official who demanded that every bride spend her wedding night with him rather than her new husband. One George, a daring young prospective groom, refused to oblige, and when he spotted Amir Ali at the spring that now bears his name, he chopped off his head. Today the spring honours the memory of the bravery of the young man.

SIGHTSEEING

THE FORTRESS TOWN OF PALAIOHORA

Palaiohora is the ruined medieval capital of Kythera, which in Byzantine times was named Agios Demetrios. This little town in the northeast of the island was built in the 12th century by colonists from Monemvasia in the Peloponnese. It is situated on the top of the mountain, overlooking the stunning Kako Langadi gorge, where two ravines meet. Palaiohora was abandoned and never reoccupied after the notorious Khairaddin Barbarossa and his fellow pirates ransacked the place in 1537, killing some of the inhabitants and taking others as slaves. The few who survived moved to nearby villages.

THE KATOUNIS BRIDGE

Kythera's most impressive bridge is a relic of British rule that unites the Hora with the port of Avlemonas. Considered the largest stone bridge in Greece, it has thirteen arches that are exactly symmetrical, enabling it to support more weight than it was designed for. It was designed in 1823 by John Macfale, an engineer who also happened to be the governor. Legend has it that commissioned it so that while supervising it every day, he could also see a girl in the nearby village who had taken his fancy. The bridge is 110 metres long, 6 metres wide and 16 metres high and took only three years to build.



FATOURADA

This is a very tasty drink usually made of pure tsipouro and cinnamon and cloves, but it can also be flavoured with tangerines, oranges, or apricots after a time-consuming process involving sun-drying the peels and pips.

WINES

Kythera wines are mostly made from local grape varieties, the main ones being arikaras (reds) and petrolanos (whites), bottled by local wineries, which also offer visitors the experience of tasting their vintages.

SALT

One of Kythera's most prized commodities, these iodine-rich salt flakes undoubtedly sweetened the islanders' difficult lives. Collecting it is a complicated and intensive task, which requires long days scraping it out of hollows and dips between sharp rocks after the summer sun makes the water left by winter waves evaporate. In the old days, each household would gather its own supply from a specific area, and only enough for its own use. When salt began to be produced commercially, the Common Land Bureau (a wonderful institution unique to Kythera and left by the British) issued regulations to establish collection rights and prevent hostilities or 'poaching'. These are renewed on an annual basis.



OIL RUSKS

These fabulous rusks, the island's most famous product, are made with sour dough, a little salt, and unbleached whole wheat flour, kneaded with plenty of olive oil. They are very light and very delicious, and you will find them in every one of Kythera's bakeries, many of which supply them to well-known food chains throughout Greece.



SOUVENIRS



SEMPRE VIVA

A special memento, this bouquet of dried yellow flowers is a lovely endemic plant that grows only in the south of the island in precipitous spots, among rocks, and on the rocky islet of Hytra, opposite Diakofti. Its Italian name reveals its unusual quality of remaining unchanged for a long time.

THYME HONEY

Kythera's thyme honey is noted for its taste, aroma and colour. In the old days, the island produced more than 40 tonnes of it. Now reduced to 15 tonnes from 4,000 hives, it is still superlative.



KYTHERA



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