

## Exploring the Mediterranean Diet in Crete

The Mediterranean diet is celebrated as the oldest diet still actively practiced today, particularly in places like Crete, Greece. The speaker recounts his journey through Crete, highlighting the rich culinary traditions and the healthy lifestyle of the locals. He emphasizes the adaptability of the Cretan people and their remarkable health, noting that those who stick to traditional foods tend to be fit.

The narrative begins with the speaker's exploration of Central Crete, where he learns about "Horta," the wild herbs that are a staple in the Cretan diet. He shares a memorable encounter with an elderly woman named Vangelio, who expertly gathers various wild chicories and fennels. This moment reflects the deep-rooted knowledge of local flora among Cretan women, who can identify numerous wild herbs. The speaker is impressed by their ability to mix these herbs into dishes, such as stuffed grape leaves (Dolma) and fried geranium leaves in olive oil, showcasing the central role of olive oil in their cuisine.

As the speaker travels through the island, he notes the historical significance of wine production, dating back 4,000-5,000 years. The olive groves are also pivotal to the Mediterranean diet, with locals actively trimming their trees in preparation for the harvest. The speaker observes traditional farming practices, including permaculture techniques where fava beans are planted to enrich the soil naturally. This polyculture approach avoids the need for chemical fertilizers and promotes biodiversity.

The speaker meets self-sufficient individuals, like Nikolas, who live off their vegetable gardens, reflecting the local emphasis on fresh produce. The café culture in Crete is highlighted through a visit to Café Neon, where he encounters an Orthodox priest enjoying breakfast, which includes peanuts and homemade cigarettes. The relaxed atmosphere and communal lifestyle contribute to the happiness of the Cretan people, with the speaker noting that social interactions often include food and drink, even at ten in the morning.

In the village of Meronas, the speaker engages with locals during a lively Saturday gathering. The scene is filled with laughter, wine, and traditional dishes, including farm-fresh chicken, snails, wild asparagus, fava beans, and sardines. The speaker remarks on the abundance of snails, which are a significant part of the Cretan diet, highlighting their nutritional benefits, such as being rich in Omega-3 fatty acids and low in fat.

Overall, the atmosphere in Crete is described as joyous, filled with laughter, good food, and a sense of community. The speaker expresses his affection for the island, appreciating the connection between its culinary heritage and the health and happiness of its inhabitants. The Mediterranean diet, deeply intertwined with the land and its resources, serves as a testament to the enduring traditions that continue to thrive in Crete. This exploration not only reveals the culinary delights of the region but also the cultural significance of food in fostering community and well-being.