

GREEK

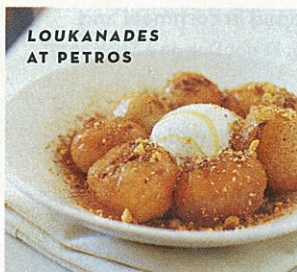


THE GREAT GREEK

UNLIKE IN CHICAGO, Detroit, and Manhattan, Greeks didn't settle around a central location in Los Angeles. In the early 1900s, a community developed around San Julian Street downtown, but in the 1950s it dispersed. With the 1952 opening of Saint Sophia Cathedral, the cornerstone of the city's Greek Orthodox community, at Normandie and Pico, a new nexus was formed. Other Greek Orthodox churches—Saint Katherine's in Redondo Beach, Saint Anthony's in Pasadena, Saint Nicholas in Northridge—came to anchor disparate neighborhoods. The traditional dishes of Greece are served in their restaurants, which are known for a spirit of hospitality called *xenia*. —Lesley Balla

The Great Greek

WITH ITS LIVE MUSIC and family-style feasts, Ernie Creizis's restaurant is a celebration—even more so when the waiters collect diners and line-dance out the door.



LOUKANADES AT PETROS

The walls are lined with Greek military paintings and posters, a contrast to the pastel linens, flowers, and twinkle lights. The Great Greek offers a constant stream of meze: creamy *tzatziki* made from yogurt, cucumbers, onions, and garlic; *spanakopita*, the classic spinach and cheese pie; *dolmades*, grape leaves stuffed with rice and ground beef; and *keftedes*, outstanding spiced meatballs. Entrées include roast baby lamb and chicken *souvlaki*. The *galaktobouriko*, phyllo sheets layered with semolina custard and drizzled with honey, is supreme. » 13362 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, 818-905-5250 or greatgreek.com. L-D daily. Full bar. \$\$

Papa Cristo's

OWNER CHRYS CHRYS's father opened the market C&K Importing in 1948, several years before the neighboring Saint Sophia Cathedral opened. In the '80s, he added the dining room with blue-and-white-checked tablecloths, posters of Greek isles, and photos of famous Hollywood Greeks. Back then people would trek from all over Southern California for the restaurant's food, and today second- and third-generation Greek Americans go for a taste of their heritage. The kitchen turns out specialties like grilled lamb chops and marinated *souvlaki*, using "secret" family recipes. The Chryses are from northwestern Greece, where the cuisine is lighter, so you won't find a lot of heavy casseroles here. Dishes are rustic—the *spanakopita*, made with puff pastry rather than phyllo, is akin to what you'd get from a street vendor in Greece. Pastries are made daily—take a box to go. » 2771 W. Pico

Blvd., L.A., 323-737-2970 or papacristo.com. L-D Tue.-Sun. Beer and wine. \$

Papadakis Taverna

BROTHERS JOHN and Tom Papadakis opened this restaurant in 1973, in a building their grandfather bought after World War I. One of them is likely to shake your hand on the way in. Family photos and USC football memorabilia (John and his sons played at the school) cover the walls; a steady flow of customers fills the tables. There's a lot to watch: Servers show off thick veal steaks and several cuts of lamb before you order; they flame *saganaki*—salty *kasseri* cheese doused in brandy—tableside with a hearty "Opa!" as a belly dancer works her way through the room. Every meal comes with *taramosalata*, a red caviar dip; cool *tzatziki*; and lemony *avgolemeno* soup. The *baklava* is ideal with a rich Greek coffee. » 301 W. 6th St., San Pedro, 310-548-1186 or papadakistaverna.com. D nightly. Beer and wine. \$\$\$

THE MAIN INGREDIENTS

FETA ACCOMPLI



C&K IMPORTING is still the best place for finding Greek specialties to take home. Among 25 Greek cheeses, the shop offers four varieties of feta, including *varelli*, a barrel-aged version. There are also Greek olive oils, fresh breads, homemade dips and sauces, Greek wines and beer, and pastries. The butter-free

baklava is good, but why skip the real thing? 2771 W. Pico Blvd., L.A., 323-737-2970 or papacristo.com. **The Foods of the Greek Islands: Cooking and Culture at the Crossroads of the Mediterranean** (Houghton Mifflin, 320 pages, \$37.50), by Aglaia Kremezi, will set you on your way.



Petros WHITE WALLS, SMOOTH ARCHES, BLOND WOOD tables, and a long marble bar make Petros perhaps the most chic and modern of L.A.'s Greek restaurants. Chef Yianni Koufodontis, who is of Greek heritage, worked at Spago and Maple Drive; owner Petros Benekos is in the fashion industry and has a clothing shop a few storefronts away. Young servers move through the crowded room, Greek music plays in the background, and dancing happens only if you stay late enough and Petros himself feels like it. The menu mixes refined regional specialties with family recipes from Ioannina (not to be confused with the Ionian Islands). Some of the restaurant's best offerings include such dishes as warm, sesame-crusted feta topped with sweet golden raisins, *astakomakaronatha* (lobster spaghetti), and lamb loin with figs. For dessert it's one of the few places that serves *loukanades* (honey-dipped doughnuts) and *bougatsa* (custard-filled phyllo). No shorts or flip-flops after 5 p.m.

» Metlox Shopping Center, 451 Manhattan Beach Blvd., Manhattan Beach, 310-545-4100 or petrosrestaurant.com. L-D daily. Full bar. \$\$\$