

September 2019

More Than Islands

Christina Macris

Cedarville University, christinaamacris@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Macris, Christina (2019) "More Than Islands," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 6 , Article 17.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol6/iss1/17

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English, Literature, and Modern Languages at DigitalCommons@Cedarville. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Idea of an Essay by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

Christina Macris

Christina is an Intercultural Studies major at Cedarville University. Growing up as a Greek in the United States and Uganda, she loves exploring new cultures, food, and places, engaging with others in multicultural understanding and community, whether on campus or elsewhere. She spends her summers volunteering with a missions organization in Greece, and her dream is to work internationally through entities that empower others and bring unity in Christ beyond cultural borders.

More than Islands

Greece is a country where people can enter as visitors and leave feeling it is a home to return to. Located in Southern Europe, it is a country that blends much of the feel of European style and elegance with the community-focused culture of the Middle East. The people of Greece are passionate, exciting, and hospitable, and the entire culture is fascinating. I keep returning to visit, growing more attached to it with every opportunity I have to be there as there is no place like it. I invite my friends to journey there so that they too can truly experience it and gain a love for this special country. I love being in Greece because it is a place of incredible beauty, delicious food, and rich culture and history.

One of the greatest draws to Greece is experiencing its incredible beauty. The gorgeous beaches depicted in movies are true to reality, as it is a country surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea. Few vacations are better spent than relaxing in the sun-warmed sand and foaming waves. There are countless islands, each

unique in its features. Zakynthos is an island of caves and shipwrecks; Mykonos is known for its hills of windmills; Santorini is famous for its white-washed homes and volcanic sand beaches. Each friend of mine who visits Greece relishes the time they spent in cruises to islands, donkey rides through villages, restful beach days, or hikes up beautiful cliffs. Even on the mainland, I can never escape the nearby beauty of the deep blue sea and rugged mountains, complimented by the simple presence of fragrant wildflowers, twisting fig trees and grape vines, and olive trees that catch the sunlight in their silvery leaves. The capital city of Athens itself is one of my favorite places. Although it is a modern European metropolis, it retains much of its long-standing feel and beauty. One of the most stunning sunset views I have ever experienced is the one from the top of Mount Lycabettus: the highest point in Athens. Every time I visit, my friends and I hike up the windy trails and hundreds of concrete steps, where each moment, the view only becomes more beautiful until reaching the top. From there, the entire bustling city of Athens is visible below, stretching as far as the eye can see, to the Mediterranean Sea that surrounds the city until disappearing into the horizon. I am always mesmerized by the blowing breeze and the sight of sunset hues reflecting off rows of apartment buildings; the vivid landscape a piece of art set to the music of sounds in a place so alive.

Part of what brings Greece to life is a unity over the enjoyment of food. One of my favorite elements of visiting Greece is the delicious food I get to eat. Greeks use the freshest vegetables, fruits, seafood, and herbs to create an abundance of flavorful dishes. Food is not for the purpose of simply refueling the body.

Rather, it is part of spending time together, enjoying truly good food with those around. Truthfully, some who have tasted Greek food in America determine that Greek food is nothing beyond the ordinary. However in the United States, it is extremely difficult for Greek dishes to achieve the same authentic flavors while working with different or lower-quality ingredients. One of the most fundamental components of Greek food is its reliance on rich, simple ingredients and flavors that blend to result in a powerfully flavorful meal. Greek fruits and vegetables burst with intense flavor and have a brightness of color and taste that much American, genetically-modified produce lacks. Even the quality of Greek olive oil makes a difference, as the high-quality oil expensively imported in America is the guaranteed standard found in every Greek kitchen. Thus, only in actually visiting Greece does one truly experience its food, and those who already love America's Greek food are thrilled to discover that it only gets better in its home country. These reasons, combined with the love and care that Greek cooks put into preparing a meal, are what make Greek food something to remember. Warm, wrapped gyros, flakey cheese pastries, oversized salads, rich ice-cream, and *karpuzi* (watermelon) that melts in your mouth are only some of the delicious foods I look forward to enjoying in my trips to Greece.

Beyond the natural beauty and delicious food, the country of Greece has an amazing depth of rich culture and history. Few other places in the world offer the opportunities to explore ancient landmarks and historical ruins that still stand today. The Parthenon is a place most recognized from ancient Greece history. Yet thousands of years later, the Parthenon still stands proudly on

the marble hill of the Acropolis, there for visitors to come and see, its cracked white columns bearing the scars of wars and wear of time, enduring as a symbol of this strong nation's history. Scattered throughout the city and countryside are ancient arenas, marble walkways, and ruins of buildings and temples to explore. There is nothing quite like climbing the marble slope of Mars Hill, to stand in the same place where the Apostle Paul once stood, teaching and conversing with these same people generations ago. The place where I most feel Greece's history and modern culture meet is in the streets of Plaka and Monastiraki: the marketplaces surrounding the base of the Acropolis. There I find street musicians and stray cats and visit leather sandal shops and souvenir stands that sell little Parthenon figurines below the monument itself. I love to wander the little basement art studios, tavernas, and cafes. All the restaurants are open late into the night, because Greece is full of life and excitement after sunset. Greek culture can truly be defined as passionate but laid back: all about food and family. I love the way relationships and time together with people are valued. There is no emphasis on following a strict schedule or really being on time, because people love to simply sit and spend time together, staying for hours over a cup of coffee. These cultural values are what makes visiting a Greek home a special experience. Hospitality is a fundamental part of the culture that traces as far back as the epics from ancient mythology, and this tradition carries on very much today. Visitors are beckoned in to sit and stay, pulled into the atmosphere of family. Older Greek ladies especially love to treat and care for visitors, welcoming and embracing everyone alike. To enter a home and not be offered juice, ice-cream, or a

meal is nearly impossible. The true Greek style of persistently offering food can seem overwhelming at first, but only stems from kindness and a tradition of *filoxenia* hospitality, literally “friend of strangers”. This is embodied in the traditional Greek greeting of a kiss on each cheek, a display of the warmth and familiarity of the culture. Greeks are warm and embracing, and it shows in both the traditions and habits that everyday people exhibit.

All of these are only some of the reasons why I love visiting Greece. The islands, beaches, mountains and cities all make up its incredible beauty. Even away from islands, mountainous terrain and bustling cities have a beauty of their own. From Greek salads, to ice-cream, to pastries, Greeks make it a priority to enjoy food, and to enjoy it well. The culture is one of excessive warmth, excitement, and hospitality. Its long-standing culture is intricately tied to its ancient history; a legacy still visible in its ruins, buildings, and traditions. It is not a place only of sights, but a place of welcome and warmth. Truly, Greece is to me a beautiful country with incredible flavors, kind people, and an amazing heritage. It is a place that draws one into a feeling of home and family, and keeps a little piece of the heart. It is why every time I return to Greece, I grow to love it a little more.