

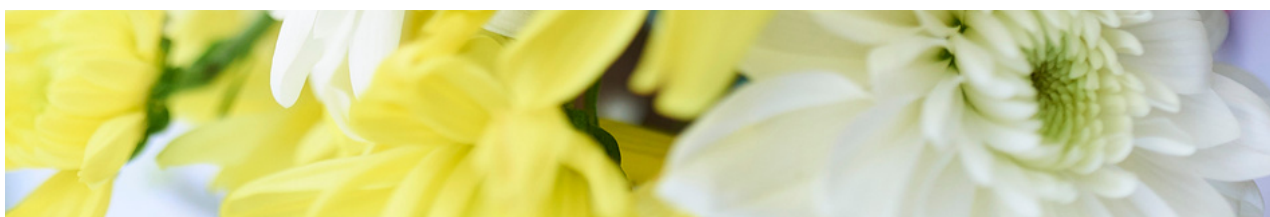


GREEK EASTER

A CELEBRATION OF FAITH, FAMILY & FEASTING



EXPERIENCE EASTER IN GREECE



GREEK EASTER

Why It Should Be On Your Bucket List



Easter in Greece is more than a religious holiday— It is the ultimate expression of hospitality and celebration, a way of bringing people together and honouring traditions passed down through generations. It's the joy of coming together, the glow of candlelight at midnight, and the warmth of a table filled with family, laughter, and time-honoured dishes. From the crack of red eggs to the sweet aroma of tsoureki, every tradition carries the essence of renewal and togetherness.

Greek Easter is not just about food, but food is at its heart. In this booklet, I'm sharing some of the most cherished Greek Easter traditions along with five of my favourite recipes to bring a taste of Greece to your home. Whether you have Greek roots or simply love discovering new cultures through food, I hope these pages inspire you.

And if you've never experienced Easter in Greece, put it on your bucket list—it's a celebration like no other!

TIMELESS TRADITIONS

The Heart Of Greek Easter



The village of Pyrgos on Santorini. Many thousands of cans containing candles are lit on Good Friday lighting the night sky.



PALM SUNDAY

THE EPITAPHIOS PROCESSION



The Tradition of Palm Crosses

On Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, a cherished custom is the making of crosses from palm fronds, which are blessed during the church service and then taken home to be placed above doorways or windows, as a symbol of faith, protection, and good fortune for the year ahead.

On Good Friday, an ornate, flower-adorned Epitaphios (a symbolic tomb of Christ) is carried through the streets in a solemn candlelit procession.

In Meteora, this takes place among the hanging monasteries, creating an unforgettable scene, while in Hydra, the Epitaphios is carried into the sea, symbolizing a blessing for sailors and fishermen.



THE HOLY LIGHT RITUAL

The Candle-Carrying Tradition

After the midnight Resurrection service on Holy Saturday, we carefully carry the lit candles home from the church, trying to keep the flame alive.

Upon arrival, we make a cross with the candle's smoke above the doorway, believing it brings blessings and protection for the year ahead.

THE BURNING OF JUDAS

On Easter Sunday evening, in many parts of Greece, an effigy of Judas Iscariot is burned on a large bonfire. This symbolic act represents the rejection of betrayal and evil.

The tradition is particularly popular in the Cyclades, Crete, and mainland villages, often accompanied by music and fireworks.





THE "ROCKET WAR"

An Island of Chios Tradition

In the village of Vrontados, Chios, an unusual and adrenaline-filled Easter tradition takes place: rival churches launch thousands of homemade rockets at each other across a valley while services are held inside.

The goal is to hit the opposing church's bell tower—whoever succeeds the most times is declared the winner! Though controlled for safety, it's a breathtaking spectacle that draws visitors from around the world.

POT SMASHING



On Holy Saturday morning, the people of Corfu celebrate the "First Resurrection" by throwing clay pots filled with water from their balconies onto the streets below.

This spectacular tradition is believed to symbolize renewal, the casting away of misfortune, and welcoming prosperity.

The loud crashes fill the air, and visitors eagerly collect pieces of the broken pottery for good luck!

THE FLAVOURS OF EASTER

Red Dyed Easter Eggs

Eggs are dyed a deep red to symbolize the blood of Christ and the renewal of life. On Easter Sunday, families play *tsougrisma*, a game where two people knock their eggs together, trying to crack their opponent's without breaking their own. The winner is said to have good luck for the year ahead!



Easter *Koulourakia* – The Festive Butter Cookies

Alongside *tsoureki*, these crispy, slightly sweet butter cookies with a delicate orange or vanilla aroma.

They are shaped into braids, twists, or small rings are served with Greek coffee or tea, they are a must-have treat throughout the Easter celebrations.



THE FLAVOURS OF EASTER

The Post-Lent Meal: *Magiritsa* Soup

After weeks of fasting, we break the fast after the midnight resurrection service with a bowl of magiritsa, a traditional soup made with lamb offal, lettuce, dill, and an egg-lemon sauce (avgolemono).

This dish helps the body transition back to richer foods after Lent.



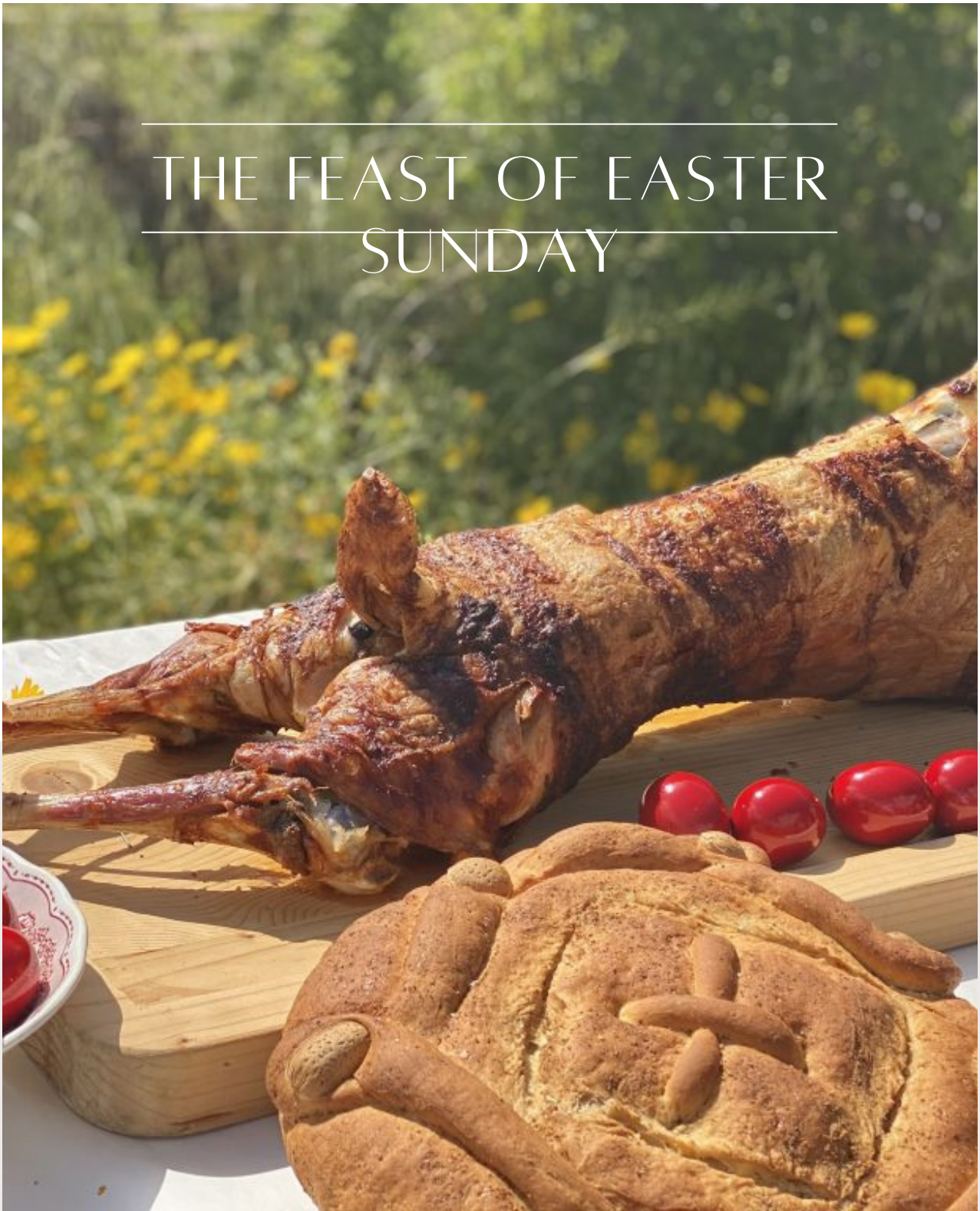
Tsoureki – The Sweet Easter Bread

Tsoureki is a soft, aromatic brioche type bread, it is often braided and decorated with red eggs. Its fluffy texture and rich scent of mastiha and mahlepi make it a favourite treat, perfect for breakfast or alongside a cup of Greek coffee.

Traditionally, it is baked on Holy Thursday, and families enjoy it throughout the Easter period.



THE FEAST OF EASTER SUNDAY



After the long fast, Easter Sunday is a day of celebration and indulgence. Families gather outdoors to roast whole lamb on a spit, symbolizing Christ as the Lamb of God. The air fills with the aromas of oregano, garlic, and lemon, and tables overflow with dishes like *tzatziki*, Greek salads, and cheese pies.

REGIONAL EASTER DISHES

These are only a few of the many regional dishes enjoyed up and down the country over lent or Easter.

***Arni Lemonato* -Peloponnese**

Slow cooked lamb flavoured with lemon, oregano and garlic.

***Arnaki Fricassée* – Northern Greece**

A comforting dish of lamb braised with greens (like lettuce, wild herbs, or chicory) in a silky egg-lemon sauce (*avgolemono*).

***Eptazymo* Easter Bread – Crete**

A unique Cretan Easter bread made with chickpea starter instead of yeast, giving it a distinct texture and earthy flavour.

***Lazarakia* (Little Lazarus Breads)**

Sweet, spiced bread rolls shaped like tiny men, traditionally baked on Lazarus Saturday to symbolize the story of Lazarus' resurrection.

***Kolokythopita* (Sweet Pumpkin Pie) – Thessaly**

A sweet Easter pie made with pumpkin, raisins, and cinnamon, often wrapped in phyllo pastry.

***Soupiorizo* (Cuttlefish with Rice) – Chios**

A Lenten dish eaten during Holy Week, featuring cuttlefish slow-cooked with rice, onions, and a touch of tomato.



FAVOURITE RECIPES TO TRY

Easter on Your Table: Five Recipes to Celebrate



VEGETARIAN MAGIRITSA SOUP



The dried mushrooms give a meatiness to the dish that is void of the traditional lamb offal

Ingredients (serves 6-8)

- 40g dried porcini mushrooms
- 500g mixed mushrooms (oyster, button, field, chestnut, chanterelles)
- 1 large white onion
- 3 spring onions
- 500g different types of lettuce
- juice and zest of 1 lemon
- ½ a fennel bulb, finely chopped
- ½ tsp ground coriander
- 100ml dry white wine
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 litre vegetable stock
- 50ml virgin olive oil
- 100g easy-cook white rice
- 3 medium eggs
- 1 bunch of fresh dill, finely chopped

Directions

Pour 100ml boiling water over the dried porcini in a bowl and leave to soak for 30 minutes. Clean the fresh mushrooms and chop in small dice. Grate the onion, and trim and finely slice the spring onions. On a clean board, slice the lettuce. Zest and juice the lemon and set aside, for serving.

Drain the soaked porcini, reserving the liquid and chop into small pieces. Caramelize all the mushrooms in batches in some hot oil and transfer to a bowl.

In a soup pan, sweat the white onion, spring onions, fennel and ground coriander over a medium heat for 3–4 minutes. Add the wine and let it evaporate. Add the chopped lettuce, the bay leaf, the porcini soaking water and the vegetable stock. Bring to the boil, then lower the heat and cook for about 15 minutes.

Rinse the rice and add it to the soup. Continue cooking for about 20 minutes, or until the rice is fully cooked. Remove the bay leaf and add most of the finely chopped dill, keeping some back to sprinkle at the end. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

In a bowl, whisk the eggs very well. Add the lemon juice in a thin stream to the beaten eggs, whisking all the time. Start adding the hot soup with a ladle, again in a thin stream to avoid the eggs curdling. Repeat two or three times. Add the whisked egg mixture to the pan removing it from the heat first. Add the cooked mushrooms and give the soup a good stir to fully incorporate.

You can place the pan back on a very low heat for the egg to fully cook, or, if you prepare the soup a few hours in advance, reheat it gently before serving. Sprinkle with the rest of the chopped dill and lemon zest.

LAMB RUMP AND SPRING VEGETABLES 'KLEFTIKO' STYLE



Here, I added extra flavour with a drizzle of parsley and garlic pesto.

Ingredients (serves 4)

- 4 rump steaks of lamb
- 1 courgette, approx. 200g, washed, trimmed and cut in small cubes
- A handful of baby potatoes cut in half
- 150g frozen peas
- 6 small plum tomatoes, cut in half
- 75g butter
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ½ lemon, juice and zest
- 1 preserved whole lemon, sliced
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 4 small sprigs of rosemary
- Sea salt flakes

Directions

Preheat the oven to 190°C.

Season the lamb with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Sear the steaks on high heat in some olive oil to brown, add a tbsp butter and baste well. Transfer to a dish and keep.

Add the chopped vegetables to the same frying pan, apart from the halved tomatoes, season and stir for 2-3 minutes to sear. Add 50g of butter, toss the vegetables to flavour and transfer to a bowl. Last, brown the tomato halves on the cut side and add to the bowl with the vegetables.

Cut four pieces of baking parchment large enough to make parcels of each piece of lamb and a quarter of the vegetables and lay them on a baking sheet.

In the centre of each piece of paper, place a quarter of the vegetables, sprinkle with a pinch of dried oregano and a little lemon zest and juice, close the parcels making a pleat all along the middle and bake in the oven for 20 minutes. At the end of this time, add the lamb to each parcel placing a piece of preserved lemon and a sprig of rosemary over each steak.

Seal the parcels again and bake for 8-12 minutes (depending on how cooked you want your lamb).

Remove from the oven, leave to rest for 10 minutes, open the parcels, cut each steak in half, scatter with some salt flakes and serve.

VEGAN – CRUNCHY GREEN VEGETABLE SALAD, HERBED CROUTONS AND A VEGAN ALMOND DRESSING



I always find that fresh, crunchy greens go perfectly with a fatty meat like lamb. Besides, it is Spring time so a salad of mixed seasonal vegetables is always welcomed at the table. I added some umami and crunch with some chopped olives and seeds.

Ingredients (serves 4-6)

For the salad

- 3 gem lettuce, sliced
- 100g mange tout
- 100g rocket
- 100g asparagus spears
- 1/2 cucumber, sliced

For the croutons

- 2 slices of wholemeal bread
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- A pinch of dried oregano
- A pinch of dried thyme

For the almond dressing

- 75g whole almonds
- 100ml almond milk
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- ½ tsp mustard
- ½ clove of garlic

Directions

Preheat the oven to 200 C.

For the croutons, remove the crust from the bread slices and cut into cubes. Put on a baking tray, drizzle with the olive oil, sprinkle with the herbs and season with some salt. Toss to coat. Bake for a few minutes, until golden brown.

To make the almond dressing, soak the almonds in boiling water for a couple of hours or overnight. Bring a small saucepan with water to the boil, blanch the almonds for 30-40 seconds and drain. While still warm, remove the skins. Place the almonds and all the other ingredients in a jug of a stick blender and blitz. Season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

For the salad, blanch the asparagus and mangetout for 2 minutes and drain. Drop in some icy water to cool down and preserve their colour.

Put in a bowl and mix with the raw vegetables. Scatter the croutons, drizzle with the almond dressing and sprinkle with seeds and sliced green olives.

BAKED FILO, MIZITHRA, SULTANA AND PISTACHIO TART



Inspired by the Cretan Kalitsounakia, this whole tart is made with fresh mizithra cheese, light filo pastry and has the added textures and flavours of pistachios and sultanas.

Ingredients (serves 6-8)

- 5 sheets of filo pastry
- 275g mizithra cheese (or ricotta)
- 75g double cream
- 50g sultanas
- 50g pistachio nuts
- 50g caster sugar
- 3 eggs
- 50g butter, melted
- Icing sugar to serve

Directions

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Brush a round oven proof dish of 25cm diameter and 4-5cm deep with butter.

Place one sheet of filo on the bottom of the dish. Drizzle with some of the melted butter and add the remaining sheets. You just want to make a casing that is strong enough to hold the filling but not too thick. I would not use more than 7 layers of filo. Use serrated scissors or a sharp knife to cut the excess filo around the rim of the dish.

In a bowl, beat the eggs, cream and sugar for a minute or so with a hand held mixer. Add the mizithra and beat it to break it up completely. Last, add the sultanas and pistachios and mix with a spatula.

Transfer the mizithra mix into the dish and bake in the oven for 50-60 minutes until the filo looks crispy and the top of the tart is golden. Leave the tart to cool and dust with the icing sugar.

Best eaten hot or warm, the tart can be kept in the fridge for a couple of days.

SOKOLATOPITA

STICKY CHOCOLATE CAKE (GLUTEN FREE)



We always associate Easter with chocolate and this is also the case in modern Greece. I love this easy to make but gooey and decadent cake served with Greek yogurt or vanilla ice cream and ref fruit compote. Cherries in kirsch would be great with it too!

Ingredients (serves 8)

- 125g unsalted butter, melted
plus extra for greasing
- 50g cocoa powder
- 250g caster sugar
- 150g almond meal
- 3 eggs, beaten
- A few drops of almond extract
- Icing sugar for dusting

Directions

Preheat the oven at 180 C.

Put the melted but cool butter in a bowl and mix in the cocoa powder, sugar, beaten eggs and almond extract. Add the almond meal and mix in well with a spatula.

Line the bottom of a 15cm spring form cake tin with baking paper and grease with some butter as well as the sides.

Pour the cake mix into the cake tin and bake in the oven for approx. 25 minutes. The cake should be firm on the outside but still gooey inside.

Leave the cake in the tin to cool a little and release. You can either transfer to a serving dish as is on its base or you may use a plate to turn it upside in order to remove the baking paper and invert again onto the serving platter so that you see the top of the cake.

It may still be sticky on the underside. Just dust with icing sugar and serve warm.



The cover and other photos in this booklet are by David Loftus who did the photography in Under The Olive Tree (recipes from my Greek Kitchen)

KALO PASCHA

May your Easter be filled with love, laughter, and
the warmth of good food shared with those who
matter most.

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