

## Unit 10: You Are What You Eat

**Narrator:** In 2014, photographer Matthieu Paley traveled to Crete, Greece's largest island, to learn about the diet and lifestyle of the Cretan people. Here, he talks about his experience and shows photos from his trip.

**Matthieu Paley:** So, I went to Crete, and I did not go to one specific area. I went all around Crete. But I ended up spending quite a lot of time in central Crete where the word Kriti is written. There's about 600,000 people living in Crete.

This is breakfast, the first day. And people adapt to anything. All these areas I visited, traditionally... if they eat only traditional food, they are all fit as hell.

I was lucky. I was there exactly a year ago. And it was time of Horta. Horta means herbs, mean the wild herbs. And so I see this old woman on the second or third day walking around, you know. And I follow her, and she's got this super sharp knife and, whoa, easy, what is she doing? She just laid down under the olive tree and she started to gather all this various wild chicory, wild fennels. All is just, goodness, it's just... it was a really beautiful scene.

And so I followed her, you know. She didn't have enough space... into her apron, so she started to take off her stuff and rolled all the wild herbs in it. It was a very beautiful moment. Vangelio her name is, 80-something-year-old woman. And then she goes back, and her daughters are there, and they start to go through all the hortas. You know, clean them, separate the different kinds.

Any average Cretan woman would give you about 20-25 names of wild herbs and go in the field and find them, and be able to know that this is still part of their knowledge. I was really blown away by this. Then they mix it with eggs. They make this Dolma with stuffed grape leaves. And then they pulled out this dish, geranium leaves fried in olive oil. Even the French fries are always fried in olive oil. There is no other oil than olive.

This is tuna plant, I was told. It's beetroot. It tastes like earth, beautiful, with oranges—they mix that. Driving around Crete, we passed vineyards. Wine comes around four, five

thousand years ago from that part of the world. It has olive groves. Olive oil is like, you know, the quintessential stuff you think of when you think of Mediterranean diet.

**Narrator:** As Paley continued driving around, he met people who were self-sufficient and living off their vegetable gardens. He stopped in a coffee shop where locals were having their breakfast. He ended up in central Crete, in a village called Meronas, where he was invited to dine with a local family.

**Matthieu Paley:** You know, this is Saturday afternoon at the Moschonas, in this little village. And they just eat, man. There is wine everywhere and drinking. They're coming back from the field, people are going. There is so much noise. Could be in Italy! You know, in my mind I was like, 'Wow, my God, the noise level in here!'

And so they are having chicken from the farm. They are having lots of snails, all the time, all year round. They have wild asparagus. They have fava beans, sardines. You know, wine, wine, wine! And they eat a lot of snail there, all the time.

It's full of omega-3. There's no fat in it. It's super good for you.

**Narrator:** So, the Mediterranean diet isn't just healthy; it also emphasizes the joyous social nature of food. It's not surprising then that, overall, Crete residents enjoy a good quality of life.