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Wine Travel In Greece: Planning A Classic Route Through Santorini And Crete

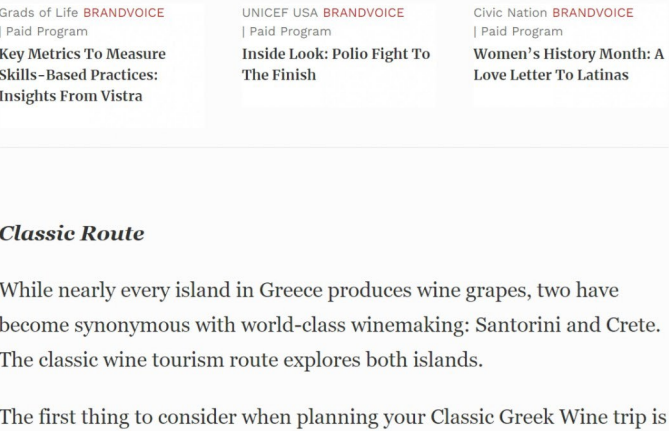
Lauren Mowery Contributor | *I enjoy drinks, travel and food, and the intersection of all three.* | [Follow](#)



Wine has been integral to Greek culture for over 4,000 years, with its origins dating back to the ancient civilizations of Crete and Mysene. The Greeks believed that wine was a gift from the gods, and it played a significant role in their religious ceremonies and daily life. Greeks are also credited with spreading the cultivation of wine grapes throughout Europe, especially across Mediterranean Islands like Sicily and Corsica.

Today, wine remains intimately intertwined with food, culture, and lifestyle. Forgoing a taste of Greek wine or a visit to a winery would be as remiss as visiting Athens and skipping the city's ancient hilltop sentry, The Acropolis. With the expansion of wine tourism and hospitality facilities, visiting wineries in Greece has never been easier. The only question to answer is whether to pick the *Classic Route* through famed Greek Islands or the *Adventurous Route* leading deep into northern Greece and The Peloponnese.

In this article, I present the ideal *Classic Route*. In the next article, I will explain the details and logistics of the *Adventurous Route*.



Book at tasting in Santorini at Domaine Sigalas. [DIMITRIOS CHRISTOPOULOS](#)

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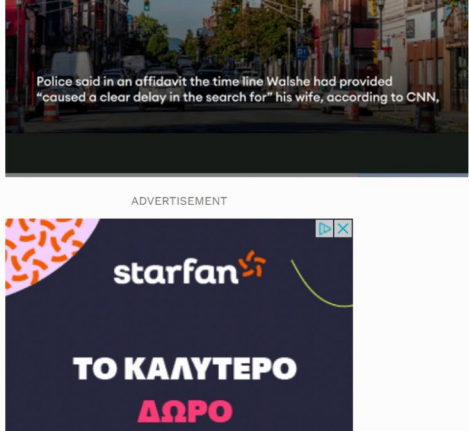
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Classic Route

While nearly every island in Greece produces wine grapes, two have become synonymous with world-class winemaking: Santorini and Crete. The classic wine tourism route explores both islands.

The first thing to consider when planning your Classic Greek Wine trip is travel logistics. Athens International Airport (ATH) offers regular flights to Santorini (50 minutes) and Crete (1 hour). A fast ferry from Piraeus to Santorini takes around 2 hours, but ferries take several hours longer. The ferry from Athens to ports in Crete runs around 10 hours, and either consumes a full day or requires an overnight cabin stay.

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If time is a greater consideration than cost, book a flight to Crete then take a ferry to Santorini. On high-speed boats run by SeaJets, the Heraklion, Crete to Thera, Santorini trip runs around 4h 45m. Then fly or take the ferry from Santorini back to Athens. Having sailed by ferry to Crete, I can confirm that the boat restaurants and accommodation leave much to be desired, not to mention the 5-6 AM arrival time in Heraklion or Chania leaves passengers stranded at the port with bags until their hotel or lodging opens. Not recommended.

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You'll find great wines and beautiful pink sand beaches like Elafonisi on Crete, Greece. [GETTY](#)



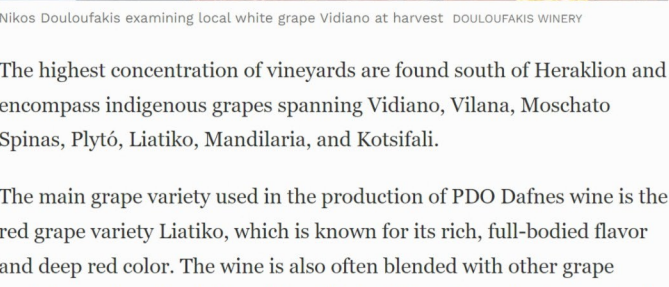
[Eric Clapton Sizzles At Japan's Budokan Concert Hall](#)

The Island of Crete

When planning a trip to Crete, remember this: Crete is big. Crete is the largest, southernmost, and most populous of the Greek islands and the fifth-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. Plan accordingly means renting a car and sticking to a few spots with a promise to return.

Most flights land at Heraklion, though Chania has an airport, too. Visitors tend to stick to the north coast, either opting for lodging near or in the darling waterfront village of Rethymno or outside the larger urban center of Heraklion. Chania, a port city an hour's drive west, features beautiful Venetian architecture and several stunning beaches that's deserving of 2-3 days of time, especially for the smattering of wineries tucked into the base of the White Mountains called Lefka Ori.

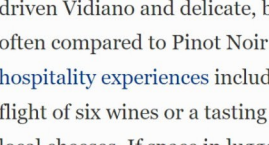
The zone of PGI Crete, established in 1989, comprises the four districts of the island: Lassithi, Heraklion, Rethymnon, and Chania. PGI Crete wines represent the unique characteristics of the island and are a testament to the long history of winemaking on the island.



Nikos Doulofakis examining local white grape Vidiano at harvest. [DOULOFAKIS WINERY](#)

The highest concentration of vineyards are found south of Heraklion and encompass indigenous grapes spanning Vidiano, Vilano, Moschato Spinas, Piyú, Liatiko, Mandilaria, and Kotsifali.

The main grape variety used in the production of PDO Dafnes wine is the red grape variety Liatiko, which is known for its rich, full-bodied flavor and deep red color. The wine is also often blended with other grape varieties such as Kotsifali and Mandilari. PDO Dafnes wine known for its rich, complex flavors which often feature notes of ripe fruit, spices, and herbs.



Mountains covered in vineyards in Crete. [DIAMOND WINE IMPORTERS](#)

Two roads lead south out of the city and into wine country: Epar.Od. Kalloni which runs southeast into the hills past a clutch of wineries and EO Iraklio Falstou that runs southwest to connect with Epar.Od. Stavrakon, another road cutting into the hills past wineries including Doulofakis Winery. (Tip: don't worry about the road names. Google maps does a decent job locating wineries on these routes.)

Doulofakis is a hidden gem. Founded in 1930, the winery focuses on high-quality wines from indigenous grapes, notably crisp, mineral-driven Vidiano and delicate, berry-scented red grape Liatiko which is often compared to Pinot Noir. Visitors can choose from several hospitality experiences including a guided winery tour followed by a flight of six wines or a tasting paired to Crete's exceptional olive oils and local cheeses. If space in luggage is an issue, you can find these wines back home through [Diamond Wine Importers](#).



Crete's landscapes are full of mountains, vineyards, olive trees and churches. [LADITHI WINEBAR](#)

Beyond wine, Crete holds a wealth of activities, from mountain hikes, beach exploration and archaeological sites. While most visitors know the famous Palace of Knossos, another fascinating visit is the Site of Gortyna. This ancient city, about 7.5 miles from Doulofakis, was the capital of Crete during the Roman period and boasts impressive ruins, including the Odeon, the Temple of Pythian Apollo, and the Law Code inscription.

Beach lovers will never hit all the dreamy spots on Crete, though a few to bookmark for a first trip include Komos and secluded Matala Beach in the south center of the island. If you're spending time in Chania, book a ferry to stunning Balos beach or head south to the pink sands and towering cliffs of Elafonisi beach.