

Anti-smoking campaign begins

Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos yesterday launched a six-month campaign to promote the enforcement of severe restrictions on smoking in public places from July 1, as a new study showed that six in 10 Greek smokers back the planned measures.

«With the drafting of a national action plan against smoking, our country has acquired a targeted and strategic policy for the promotion and safeguarding of public health,» Avramopoulos told a conference.

The minister stressed that the new restrictions would be enforced strictly but also appealed to citizens to contribute to efforts aimed at bringing Greece into line with European Union standards on curbing the risks posed by passive smoking. He noted that 20,000 Greeks die of smoking-

related diseases every year, adding that the habit costs the National Health System 2.14 billion euros annually.

The law, scheduled to come into effect on July 1, dictates that all offices and other public places, including bars and restaurants, must set aside designated areas for smokers. Restrictions on smoking have been adopted in many offices already. The bill also aims to keep minors from smoking, and from consuming alcohol, by banning their access to bars and clubs and imposing large fines on the managers of establishments that fail to respect these restrictions.

The country's bars and restaurants will be the hardest hit by the measures. Those whose premises are smaller than 70 square meters will have to choose whether to be characterized

as exclusively smoking or nonsmoking establishments.

According to a new study carried out by Kapa Research on behalf of the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, 62 percent of Greek smokers welcome the planned measures, with one in 10 saying the initiative provides them with an incentive to kick the habit and four in 10 saying they plan to cut down. The study also suggests that the law will have an impact on the business of bars and restaurants as a third (34 percent) of smokers say they will visit them less often because of the new measures. Exactly the same proportion of nonsmokers questioned said they would visit bars and restaurants more often thanks to the smoking restrictions.

Bad start to year for Athens tourism

Hotel room occupancy dropped by about 20 percent in the Athens region in the first quarter of 2009, pointing to a bad year and job losses for the sector, the Attica Hotel Association (EXA) said yesterday.

Tourism accounts for nearly a fifth of Greece's gross domestic product (GDP) and employs one in five of the country's work force.

Just 49 percent of rooms in three- to five-star hotels were booked in the first quarter, compared with 60 percent in 2008, the association said, citing a study by GBR Consulting. Average revenue per room slumped 20 percent to 53.20 euros.

Bookings may have also been hurt by the failure to highlight Attica in the state's annual tourism advertising campaign and confusion over museum hours, said Georgios Tsakiris, president of EXA.

If the first-quarter decline remains throughout the year, as many as 15,000 jobs could be lost in tourism and revenues could slide by 500 million euros, Tsakiris added.

The Greek economy is expected to shrink in 2009 and 2010 after 15 consecutive years of growth, the International Monetary Fund said last week, partly due to falling tourist arrivals.

Greek tourism is bracing for a difficult year, with industry sources expecting a decrease in arrivals this year of up to 20 percent from 2008 levels.

Moussaka Is The Olympus Of Greek Food

Artists and scholars know Greece for its theater, its sculpture, its magnificent architecture and its rich trove of literature.

Vacationers and sun worshippers know Greece for its deep blue waters, its pristine beaches and magnificent cities.

Lovers of good food, though, revere Greece probably as no other segment of the population. This is the nation that brought us savory charcoal-roasted lamb, tangy lemon soup and heady feta cheese, to name just a few.

In the greater Chicago area in particular, where I lived prior to my move to Kentucky, Greek ownership of a restaurant instantly tells the patron that here is a place with a wide selection of food at reasonable prices that is lovingly and artfully prepared. I can say that I have never gone into a restaurant that is Greek-owned and operated — whether it be the genuine ethnic eatery or the corner diner, and been disappointed with the food.

What makes Greek people so



expert at preparing great food? I think it's a basic sensuality that is born of the culture itself. Greek people tend to be passionate about all things and eating is one of the most sensual, passionate things in which one can indulge.

What, then, is the epitome of great Greek dining? I like to think of it as moussaka, that unique blend of lamb, herbs and incredible topping that can be matched nowhere else. Don't like lamb, you say? Nonsense! Try this and you'll find true love! Can you substitute ground beef? Yes, you can and it'll be tasty, but you'll be missing out on "the real deal," as they say.

Here, after many years and much experimentation is our version of moussaka. It goes very well, indeed with a Greek salad made with real Greek olives and chunks of the magnificently spicy feta cheese.

A dressing for the salad?

Regular Italian will do, but whether you make your own or buy the bottled variety, add about an extra teaspoon of dried oregano, a dash of lemon juice and about an extra half teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper. And, of course, if you're making your own, extra virgin olive oil should be your

choice. Try this and put some Greek music on the stereo. You'll be transported!

Moussaka

1 large eggplant
Olive oil
2 medium onions, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 lb. ground lamb
1 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. dried thyme
1 tsp. dried oregano
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
2 T fresh parsley, chopped
1 quart canned tomatoes
1/2 cup dry white wine (vermouth is okay)
2 egg whites
1/2 cup bread crumbs
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Cut the eggplant into 1/2-inch slices, set aside. Brown meat with the onion and garlic, drain off the fat. Add all seasonings, tomatoes and wine. Cover and cook slowly for about 30 minutes. Cool to room temperature. Mix in the unbeaten egg whites and half the crumbs. In a separate pan, brown the eggplant slices in olive oil.

Sprinkle the bottom of a large baking pan or casserole with the remaining bread crumbs and cover with a layer of eggplant. Spoon on all the meat mixture and pour the sauce (recipe follows) over all. Top with fresh grated Parmesan cheese.

Topping

3 T flour - 3 T butter
1 1/2 cups milk
1/2 tsp. salt - 2 egg yolks
pepper to taste

Melt butter, being careful not to brown. Add flour slowly, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Slowly mix in milk and return to heat, stirring until thickened. Beat the egg yolks well and add them to the sauce with salt and pepper to taste, stirring constantly until well blended. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until the top is golden brown.

Qld authorities await swine flu test results

There are still 15 Queenslanders waiting for swine flu test results. At this stage, there are no confirmed cases of swine flu in Australia Queensland Health yesterday cleared four of the seven people who were on a flight with a group of New Zealand school children who had been to Mexico. Another 15 people in Queensland are still waiting on test results to confirm if they have swine flu. They will be given Tamiflu if they test positive for the virus. Pilots and staff on all international flights arriving in Australia are on high-alert for any passengers with flu-like symptoms. Thermal scanners are being sent to the country's major airports. A scanner for use at the Brisbane International Airport is expected to arrive later today. Queensland Tourism Minister Peter Lawlor says swine flu may encourage Australians to reconsider travel plans and holiday at home. He says swine flu is also likely to reduce the number of overseas visitors to Australia.