

A Greek Taverna in Tokyo

I found myself in the country of the rising sun. I was a guest at a Japanese friend's house and thus found myself cut off from everything Greek. One evening, Tokyo, where I was, was hit by a hurricane. Since we could not leave the house we were surfing the Japanese internet. We suddenly found ourselves on a Japanese web page where the only thing I could make out was the Greek flag. My friends translated the text for me and it turns out it was advertising the only Greek tavern in the city of Tokyo. We immediately called the restaurant and my friends set up an interview with the owner the very next day.



account and quite tired from my job, in 1997, I made the decision to quit my job at Honda and come to Greece in order to learn how to cook Greek food. I stayed in Athens for two months and volunteered to work for "Acropolis" tavern (without pay) in order to learn how to cook Greek food. After that, I returned to Tokyo and opened up "Giorgos tavern". I named it this way because I believe half the male population of Greece shares this name. A lot of friends and acquaintances thought it was crazy to leave my well paid job at Honda to open a restaurant that sells strange food—which is what they called Greek food. These are the same people that now come and eat that strange food every Saturday."

This year the tavern will complete its 8th year of operation. The menu

5 pm, Kouagoe, Giorgos tavern. There's a big photo of Parthenon right outside the building. The name of the tavern's name, which is "George's tavern", is written in Japanese. A great big Greek flag hanging on the restaurant's main entrance asserts the building's "greekness". The owner greets us as we enter a place reminiscent of the traditional taverns of Athonos square in Thessaloniki. With Kaio's help—my Japanese friend, we get introduced. Mr. Mourata Matsousinge gave up his Computer Programmer position in Honda to open a Greek tavern, the only Greek tavern in Sushi Capital, Tokyo.

His love for Ballan dances drew him to travel to distant Bulgaria. This is where he first started taking dancing lessons and got to try Bulgarian food. Two months later, he leaves Bulgaria feeling dissatisfied with the gastronomical reality, the restaurant service and the communist regime. "Despite all of the above, I realized that us Japanese do not know a whole lot about European food.

Three years later he returns to the Balkans to attend dancing classes. This

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time his destination is exotic Greece. His getting to know Greece was meant to change his lifestyle as well as his profession.

"In 1978 I go on holiday to Greece and I attend dancing lessons. I also start discovering my favourite cuisine, Greek. I visited several Athens taverns and I realized a tavern is not just a restaurant. it is a place that embodies its own philosophy on how to live one's life. It embodies a Greek philosophy of life" stresses Mr Matsousige.

While on holiday in Greece he buys his first bouzouki and learns to play on his own while listening to Greek rebetika songs. He suddenly stops talking to me and showcases his bouzouki knowledge by expertly playing the famous "Fragosyriani" song. I was speechless. He continues his narration holding on to his latest acquisition, no less than a baglama (another traditional Greek musical instrument)!

"I learned to play on my own, since I never took lessons in Greece and, in Japan, I am not sure whether there is even one other person able to play bouzouki. Naturally, the fact that I know how to play the guitar made it easier for me. In general, I do not consider it hard to learn to play bouzouki. However, learning to speak Greek is very hard. I can only say 5 or 6 words in Greek. Japanese people find it particularly hard to learn to speak Greek."

Once his trip to Greece is over, he returns to his Computer Programming job in Japan. However, he remains greatly affected by Greek culture. Two years later he returns for another holiday in Greece.

"Greece was the "refuge" that protected me from the stress of my day to day life in Japan. Your country offered me some of the most care-free moments of my life combined with the taste of Greek food. Taking this into

includes souvlaki, gyro, tzatziki, mousaka, stuffed tomatoes and anything you would expect to find in a Greek tavern. The food is accompanied by "Mythos" beer and Greek wines, which Mr Mourata imports from Greece (after having consulted the Greek Embassy). However, what makes "Giorgos tavern" famous to those Japanese people who are in the know as far as international cuisine goes, is the live music which is no other than solo bouzouki played by the owner, Mr. Mourata.

"In the beginning things weren't easy", Mr Mourata tells us.

"The first three years were a little bit hard because it is hard to expect someone in Japan to open up to Greek cuisine as the only European cuisine known in Japan is French cuisine. It is difficult for a customer to trust someone they do not know. In the beginning customers were very concerned about what they would be eating at my tavern. However, after the first bite of Mousaka or souvlaki, the no longer doubted how delicious the food was. As time went by, word got around and we are now enjoying a great reputation. I no longer have any time to rest because I cook, I play bouzouki and I teach dancing to everyone interested in learning to dance to Greek music."

Apart from managing the tavern, Mr. Mourata also teaches reek dancing at a Tokyo dancing school twice a week. He knows hasaposerviko, zeibekiko, sirto and kalamatiano.

The only negative thing, he says is touristic places' taverns' owners who try to take advantage of tourists by not serving their best food to them.

Mr Mourata's next trip to Greece is scheduled for next summer. He is going to his favorite Thessaloniki where he will meet his old friends.

Greeks in Guatemala

Guatemala- A special on Greeks in Guatemala by the Athens News Agency portrays a vibrant community of people active in a broad range of activities, ranging from the "Molon Lave" plastics to "Grecia" chocolates, which later spawned an entire chocolate manufacturing business by Panagiotis Papachiou, the first Greek to officially migrate to Guatemala in 1926. But there are also stories of a Greek boat builder by the name of Mavros the first Greek to set up shop in this Central American country in 1900. The country's largest port, Buerto Barrios, is home to a number of Greek families. Liberis Chronopoulos, for instance, left his hometown of Tripoli, in Peloponnisos, married and ended up staying 35 years to be near his children. Today he is 67 years old. Christos Klikopoulos, from Litochoro in Katerini, set up the "Europa" hotels, a highly successful business now run by his children.

Equally impressive is the story of four Greeks who in 1960 set up a plastics production business after buying used equipment from Colombia. Since 1962, the business has led to a number of companies including Metaloplast, Megaplast, Elenoplast, Lacoplast, Xeoplast, Neoplast, Spartaplast, Diversiplast and Aristoplast. There is also the story of Giannis Kefalas, a former basketball player and coach to the Guatemalan national team, who today runs one of the top 100 silk screen businesses in the world. Greek businessmen continue to settle in Guatemala. Ippokrates Eliadis and Nikos Vatsakis are two such younger generation Greeks who are currently running successful businesses in the country. Speaking to ANA, Mr. Vatsakis, who left Skala in Laconia 35 years ago said that Greeks have always been very well received in Guatemala.

Dimitri Molyviatis is a case in point. He was general secretary of the country's Christian Party that was in government in the 80's. Speaking to ANA, Mr. Molyviatis, who runs the 7 Caldos restaurants and holds regular meetings with fellow Greeks at the «Greek Corner», said that there is no official Greek community in Guatemala. He also said that if Greek cultural events were to be held in the country, participation would be 'unprecedented'.

The living has not been easy for the 21 Greek families living in Guatemala, which emerged from a 35-year civil war as recently as 1996.