

Centuries of nectar in the heart of Mykonos

MYKONOS TOWN, Greece - The narrow, winding streets of the largest town on this small island are like a maze within a maze. While meandering past boutiques offering trinkets for tourists (albeit some quite expensive trinkets), it's easy to lose one's sense of direction as the bright sun bounces off the whitewashed walls and the cerulean sky matches the intensity of brightly painted shutters and doors.

In the midst of this delightful confusion is Nektar and Ambrosia, a shop selling locally made honey. If in your mind you picture "honey shop" as something dark and funky, think again. The shop is more like a high-tech apothecary - with sculptures of large bees dangling overhead. Along the white interior walls, jars of the golden substance glisten, spotlighted across evenly spaced shelves or encased in stylish glass hives. This is Mykonos, after all, a destination for the chic and the famous, or those who aspire to be either.

On a recent afternoon, salesclerk Nikoleta Roumeliotou cheerfully invites visitors to sample varieties of honey thyme, eucalyptus, fir, and mountain tea, while extolling the healthy benefits of each. "In general, thyme is the most ther-

apeutic," says Roumeliotou. Pointing to a salve made of propolis, a natural resin collected by bees to seal gaps in their hives, she adds, "You use this externally, for wounds or burns."

Nektar and Ambrosia is a 200-year-old family-run business that uses nectar from hives on the island and in Nafplion, a town in the Peloponnese. Eighty acres on Mykonos alone are covered with over 1,000 varieties of wildflowers.

In a private back room, the unassuming owner Nikos Reppas is chatting with a local fisherman at a scratched wooden desk surrounded by empty jars and scientific tomes extolling the virtues of honey, bees, and related topics. Above the doorway, old black-and-white photos of his grandparents hang in simple frames. "It's not that you eat



Except for the bee-keeping suit on the mannequin, Nektar and Ambrosia looks almost like an apothecary in the middle of Mykonos Town. But in this shop, honey is the remedy for many ills. (Necsee Regis for The Boston Globe)

honey because it's sweet or you like the taste, but it's good for the body," says Reppas, speaking with Roumeliotou acting as translator. "It's filled with vitamins, acid, and minerals.

"When I was 3 years old, I went to the beehives with my father," says Reppas, recalling the first time he tasted honey. "I ate some and then a bee stung me." He took off running with the bees in hot pursuit. "I was wearing a red shirt and they were bothered and aggressive." Reppas laughs about this early experience. He believes that stings

are good for arthritis, and other illnesses "because the bees eat pollen that goes into the sting." Quoting statistics from studies in Italy, Reppas adds, "The sting goes into the whole system like a human growth hormone."

The store also sells royal jelly, a substance secreted from the salivary glands of worker bees as food for the larvae. Reppas, who occasionally trades this product for fresh seafood with the aforementioned fisherman, recommends it to boost energy levels. "Royal jelly has vitamins and amino acids," he says. "It's

a natural steroid." He suggests putting a little jelly on the end of a toothpick and placing it under the tongue, followed by a spoon of honey and pollen.

For those who love the taste of honey, regardless of its alleged healing properties, the honeycomb-sealed jars at Nektar and Ambrosia are perfect mementos of this sun-drenched island. According to Reppas, the pure, strong flavor is the result of never using chemicals on their land, and of the wildflowers, which he refers to as "not calm" flowers, meaning not commercially produced.

Also for sale are cellophane-wrapped bars of pasteli, a traditional Greek dessert made with honey, sesame seeds, and nuts. A quick pick-me-up, pasteli is most similar to an energy bar, making a beeline to this shop even more worthwhile.

First liturgy in Agia Sofia in 557 years

MEMBERS of The International Congregation of Agia Sofia (ICAS) on September 17 unveiled their plan to visit Istanbul in a year's time to conduct a liturgy at the holy church, the first since its seizure by the Ottoman Turkish forces on May 29, 1453.

Addressing a news conference in Athens, ICAS president Chris Spyrou released his letter to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan inviting him to join the congregation, its affiliated organisations as well as other religious and political leaders, in a "pilgrimage" to Agia Sofia.

"As the political leader of the state in which our Holy Church, Agia Sofia, is located, we invite you to join us in what shall be a 'Pilgrimage to the Holy Church of Agia Sofia', similar to the pilgrimages in which our religious ancestors took part for 916 years before the Great Church was violently taken from our Christian forbearers." Spyrou, who is also president of the Hellenic-American Union in Athens, said the date chosen to conduct the liturgy at Agia Sofia was

Friday 17 September 2010 because September 17 is the day the Orthodox Christian religion celebrates the holy feast day of 'Sofia, Faith, Hope and Love'.

Appealing to Erdogan's convictions as a devout Muslim, Spyrou emphasised the fact that the present status of the Agia Sophia as a museum is not consistent with the tenets of Islam. "Five hundred and fifty six (556) years have passed since the occupation of our church: more than five centuries of occupation, desecration, sacrilege, abuse, neglect, and disrespect - actions which are neither practised nor condoned by the religion of Islam," Spyrou said, adding: "Years and actions that a world which claims to be civilised should no longer accept or tolerate."

Spyrou noted that the international pilgrimage and prayer in the Holy Church of Agia Sofia provides a unique opportunity for the political and religious leaders of the world to gather and to unite in peace and prayer.

"We expect the International Gathering and Prayer in the Holy Church of Agia Sofia to serve as the focal point for an International Summit of Peace and Prayer under the golden dome of the Holy Church of Agia Sofia, the dome under which the Great Schism of the Eastern and Western Christian Churches took place in AD1057," Spyrou wrote to Erdogan. "Under that same dome on 17 September 2010, not only Christians but people of all faiths will be invited to come together. 'Where the great separation occurred, the seeds of unity and peace shall be planted'".



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