

Tasting Culture: Nordic and Mediterranean Food, Tradition, and Nutrition

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INSTRUCTORS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

We eat to live. But food isn't just about survival, it's about so much more: health, pleasure, identity, symbolism, class, memory, sensation, and on and on. We express who we are through our food. But how we eat is also shaped by other forces: doctors' advice, economic ability, government regulations, climate, history, and many other factors often invisible to us in our everyday lives. Over four weeks we will explore two distinct cultural contexts in Europe—Denmark and Greece—allowing us to understand both the commonalities and the differences that such forces bring to food and cuisine, as well as people's imagination and inventiveness in creating something to eat.

The course begins in Athens, Greece, a country associated with the Mediterranean diet and a strong cultural history of knowledge and attention to food. We will supplement this exploration with a few days on the island of Naxos, to explore the locality of food traditions and production. The course continues in Copenhagen, Denmark, the emergent capital of New Nordic Cuisine, where tradition is being reinvented at levels both everyday and haute cuisine. To balance our understanding of urban foodways, we will also spend a couple of days on the rural island community of Samsø, known for quality produce and sustainable living. These four locations will enable us to do comparative research and both explore and deconstruct the categories of new/old, urban/rural, north/south, global/local, tradition/modernity, and change/continuity. Along the way, the medicalization of diets, changes in agriculture, food tourism, food security, nationalism, locality, sustainability, and more will be addressed. When not in the classroom, we will visit farms, vineyards, groves, restaurants, markets, museums, kitchens, sweets shops, cooperatives, NGOs, and festivals in our quest to experientially study food, and taste everything that comes our way. By taking this class, students will develop a sound understanding of how food is studied as an expression of society and culture, and hands-on training in the methodologies used to examine food and food practices.



Open market tour, central Athens.

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

- You will gain a firm understanding of the study of food in its social and cultural aspects, working towards understanding the multilayered dimensions of food practices.
- You will become familiar with the bibliography related to food in Denmark and Greece.
- You will be able to analyze food practices within a general understanding of the social structures of the contemporary Danish and Greek societies and their historical development.
- You will learn to think about preparing, sharing, and eating food as activities that are central to building human relationships and creating meaning.

- You will become a critical reader of advertising, labeling, and popular news stories related to food and health.
- You will understand the central themes in contemporary debates surrounding food in regard to health, identity, nutrition, nation, gender, environment, and more in a European context.
- You will have broadened your palate with many amazing new tastes and textures.
- You will receive a basic introduction to ethnographic and organoleptic research methodologies and have put those research methods into practice.

STUDY TOURS

You spend two weeks in Copenhagen, Denmark with DIS and two in Athens, Greece with CYA, thus you will travel on two short Study Tours. You will spend two of your weekends sailing out to the islands of Ikaria in Greece and Samsø in Denmark to explore local food practices. Please note that both of these islands are remote, and thus our access to the internet will be sporadic.

Study Tour Objectives

- You will understand the terroir of these islands and how it works in tandem with other forces in shaping the local food cultures.
- You will gain insight into the factors that affect the production and consumption of food.
- You will improve your skills in tasting and assessing foods.

Ikaria, Greece

The island of Ikaria has become quite famous in recent years as part of the “Blue Zone”—areas where the population reportedly lives unusually long lives. Food, sociality, history, and lifestyle all come together in Ikaria to create a unique society, and together we’ll be exploring the myths, stereotypes, and realities of life there. We’ll be attending a local festival, meeting food producers, and discussing life there with locals.

Samsø, Denmark

Samsø is known for producing high-quality sustainable vegetables such as potatoes and carrots. These are staples in Nordic cuisine. Additionally, Samsø has a unique island climate with rare indigenous plants that chefs have recently started to explore. While on Study Tour, we explore how the terroir of Samsø, as well as history of the island, inform local practices around food production and consumption. We will meet with manufacturers of produce, sample their goods and learn about how they are used.

APPROACH TO TEACHING

Classes are conducted as a combination of lectures, group discussions and interactive exercises. Active student participation is expected. Class sessions will be complemented by field studies and independent field work.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Students are expected to show up for class prepared and participate actively.

Computers and tablets are allowed in class PURELY for note taking purposes and class activities, unless they have an accommodation. Cases of other uses such as Facebook, emails, or internet surfing will have a negative impact on your participation grade. Cell phones are to be shut off or silenced during class and texting etc. during class will have a negative impact on your participation grade.

Tastings of foods are regularly conducted both in the classroom and on our excursions; note that not all tastings will be able to accommodate all dietary restrictions, and dietary alternatives may not exist in some contexts. We also cannot guarantee the lack of cross-contamination for food allergies in many of the places we visit.

Students should be aware that this course takes us to locations where there is hilly and uneven terrain, where

temperatures may be high with no shade, and where there are loud noises and strong smells.

EVALUATION

Grade calculation

Assignment 1	15%
Assignment 2	15%
Assignment 3	20%
Assignment 4	15%
Field Notebook	15%
Participation	20%

Participation is evaluated as follows:

- Do you participate actively during class sessions and excursions?
- Were you timely and prepared?
- Do you show respect to classmates and the learning environment?
- Do you show respect to guest lecturers and the environments we visit?

Active class participation throughout the course: A=96 / Occasional participation: B=86 / Little or no participation: C=76. Fine-tuning of percentage points may occur, reflecting student performance.

Note that attendance at all classes and field studies is required and expected and is not credited as participation. Failure to attend will have a negative influence on the participation grade, however.

Notebooks are evaluated as follows:

- Do you complete the homework and notebook prompts?
- Do you use your journal in and out of class?
- Do your notes show detail and reflection?
- Are you both observing and analyzing?

Rubrics for the assignment grades are distributed with the assignment descriptions.

How to Get a Good Grade

- Involve yourself! Allow yourself the luxury of taking a genuine interest in the course, i.e. in 'food'. It may not be your core field or interest, but why not join the many students who have been surprised at how interesting it actually is to suddenly understand the history and nutrition we consume.
- Get organized! Enter all due dates in a calendar and set aside time to work on assignments and prepare for class.
- Prepare for class! Every class!
- Take good notes! You will be graded on your analytical thinking.
- Participate! Sharing your thoughts and ideas in class is not just important for the participation grade, it is one of the best tools for developing your analytical skills.
- Follow the directions! A detailed description and assessment rubric will be distributed for each assignment.

COURSE SCHEDULE

A detailed daily schedule with required readings will be distributed at the start of the course. What follows is a provisional draft schedule.

Mon Jun 16

Arrivals

Tues Jun 17

10am-11am Canal tour

12-1pm Introduction to the class (classroom)

1pm-3pm The social science of food

Wed Jun 18

10-1pm Histories of food in Denmark and Greece (classroom)

Thurs June 19

10-12pm Taste and distinction (classroom)

2pm Fieldwork

Fri June 20

1pm-2:30pm Gender and Food (classroom)

4pm-7:30pm Excursion Frederiksberg Chocolate

Sat June 21

No class

Sun June 22

No class

Mon June 23

10am-12pm Food and Othering (classroom)

1:30pm Excursion to the Disgusting Food Museum in Malmo, Sweden

Tues June 24

Island of Samsø study tour

Wed June 25

Island of Samsø study tour

Thurs June 26

Island of Samsø study tour

Fri June 27

10am-2pm Excursion Reffen

Sat June 28

No class

Sun June 29

Excursion to Tivoli (time TBA)

Mon June 30

Transfer to Athens

6-8pm Neighborhood foodscapes

Tues Jul 1

9am-12pm Farmer's market research excursion

Wed Jul 2

9am-12pm walk with NGO Shedia

Thurs Jul 3

No class

Fri Jul 4

No class

Sat Jul 5

Morning class TBA, lunch excursion

Departure for Island of Ikaria study tour after lunch

Sun Jul 6

Island of Ikaria study tour

Mon Jul 7

Island of Ikaria study tour

Tues Jul 8

Island of Ikaria study tour

Wed Jul 9

Island of Ikaria study tour

Thurs Jul 10

10am-1pm Walking tour Central Market excursion

3-5pm Globalization, glocalization, localization (classroom)

Fri Jul 11

Excursion to Varnava Village and the European Museum of Decorative Bread (time TBA)

Sat Jul 12
Departures

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY (some readings will be assigned in full, some are selections, and some will be taught in class)

- Barthes, Roland. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 23–30. Routledge, 2012.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984 (1979).
- Danish Agriculture and Food Council. Denmark, Danish Food and Gastronomy. Copenhagen: Danish Agriculture & Food Council, 2011.
- De Certeau, Michel, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2: Living and Cooking*. Univ. Of Minnesota Press, 1998. (selections)
- DeSoucey, Michaela. "Gastronationalism Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union." *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 432–455.
- Douglas, Mary. "Deciphering a Meal." *Deadalus*, Winter 10 (1972): 61–81.
- Du Boulay, Juliet. "Work and Bread." *Cosmos, Life and Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Village*, Denise Harvey, 2009, pp. 134–60.
- Fatourou, Katerina. "Experiencing Dance as Social Process: A Case Study of the Summer Paniyiri in Ikaria Island." *Congress on Research in Dance Conference Proceedings*, (2016):148–55.
- Hald, Mette Marie, Jacob Mosekilde, Betina Magnussen, Martin Jensen Søe, Camilla Haarby Hansen, and Morten Fischer Mortensen. "Tales from the barrels: Results from a multi-proxy analysis of a latrine from Renaissance Copenhagen, Denmark." *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 20 (2018): 602-610.
- Halkier, Bente. "Normalising Convenience Food?: The Expectable and Acceptable Places of Convenient Food in Everyday Life among Young Danes." *Food, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2017): 133–51.
- Halkier, Bente, and Iben Jensen. "Doing 'Healthier' Food in Everyday Life? A Qualitative Study of How Pakistani Danes Handle Nutritional Communication." *Critical Public Health*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2011): 471–83.
- Herzfeld, Michael. "Culinary Stereotypes: The Gustatory Politics of Gastro-Essentialism." In *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*, by Jakob A. Klein James L. Watson, 31–47. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Holm, Lotte, Marianne Pipping Ekström, Jukka Gronow, Unni Kjærnes, Thomas Bøker Lund, Johanna Mäkelä, and Mari Niva. "The Modernisation of Nordic Eating. Studying Changes and Stabilities in Eating Patterns." *Anthropology of Food* 7 (2012).
- Kjeldsen, Chris, Lise C. Deleuran, and Egon Noe. "The Quality Turn in the Danish Food Scape: New Food Chains Emerging—New Territorial Impacts?." *Acta Agriculturae Scandinavica*, 63, no. 1 (2013): 19-28.
- Kravva, Vasiliki. "The Taste of Belonging: An Ethnographic Approach to the Study of Commensality and Collectivity." *Balkan Border Crossings: First Annual of the Konitsa Summer School* (2008): 202.
- Leer, Jonathan. "The Rise and Fall of the New Nordic Cuisine." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 8, no. 1 (2016).
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "The Culinary Triangle." *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 1997, pp. 28–35.
- Luetchford, Peter. "Ethical Consumption: The Moralities and Politics of Food." In *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*, by Jakob A. Klein James L. Watson, 387–405. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Meneley, Anne. "Like an Extra Virgin." *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 4 (2007): 678–687.
- Morell-Hart, Shanti, and Tina Moffat. "How the Mediterranean Diet Became No. 1 — and Why That's a Problem." *The Conversation*, 9 Mar. 2020.
- Papagaroufali, Eleni. "Uses of Alcohol among Women: Games of Resistance, Power and Pleasure." In *Alcohol, Gender and Culture*, edited by Dimitra Gefou-Madianou, 48–70. New York: Routledge, 1992.

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- Petridou, Elia. "What's in a Place Name? Branding and Labeling Cheese in Greece." *Food, Culture and Society* 15, no. 1 (2012): 29–34.
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- Sutton, David E. *Secrets from the Greek Kitchen: Cooking, Skill, and Everyday Life on an Aegean Island*. Univ of California Press, 2014. (selections)
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- Tresidder, Richard. "Eating Ants: Understanding the Terroir Restaurant as a Form of Destination Tourism." *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2015): 344–60.
- Urry, John. *Consuming Places*. Routledge, 2002.
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- Yiakoumaki, Vassiliki. "'Local,' 'Ethnic,' and 'Rural' Food: On the Emergence of 'Cultural Diversity' in Greece since Its Integration in the European Union." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24, no. 2 (2006): 415–445.