

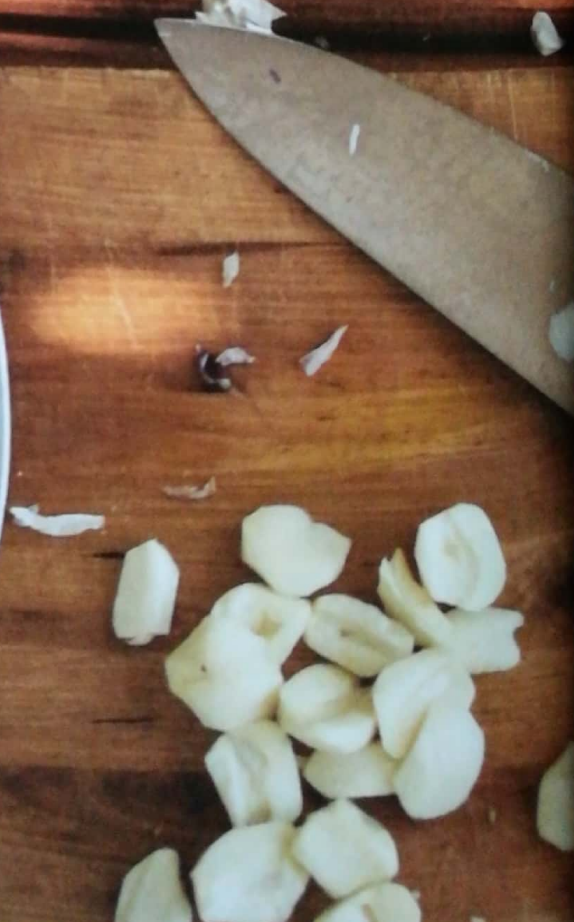


# THE Blue Zones Kitchen

100 RECIPES TO LIVE TO 100

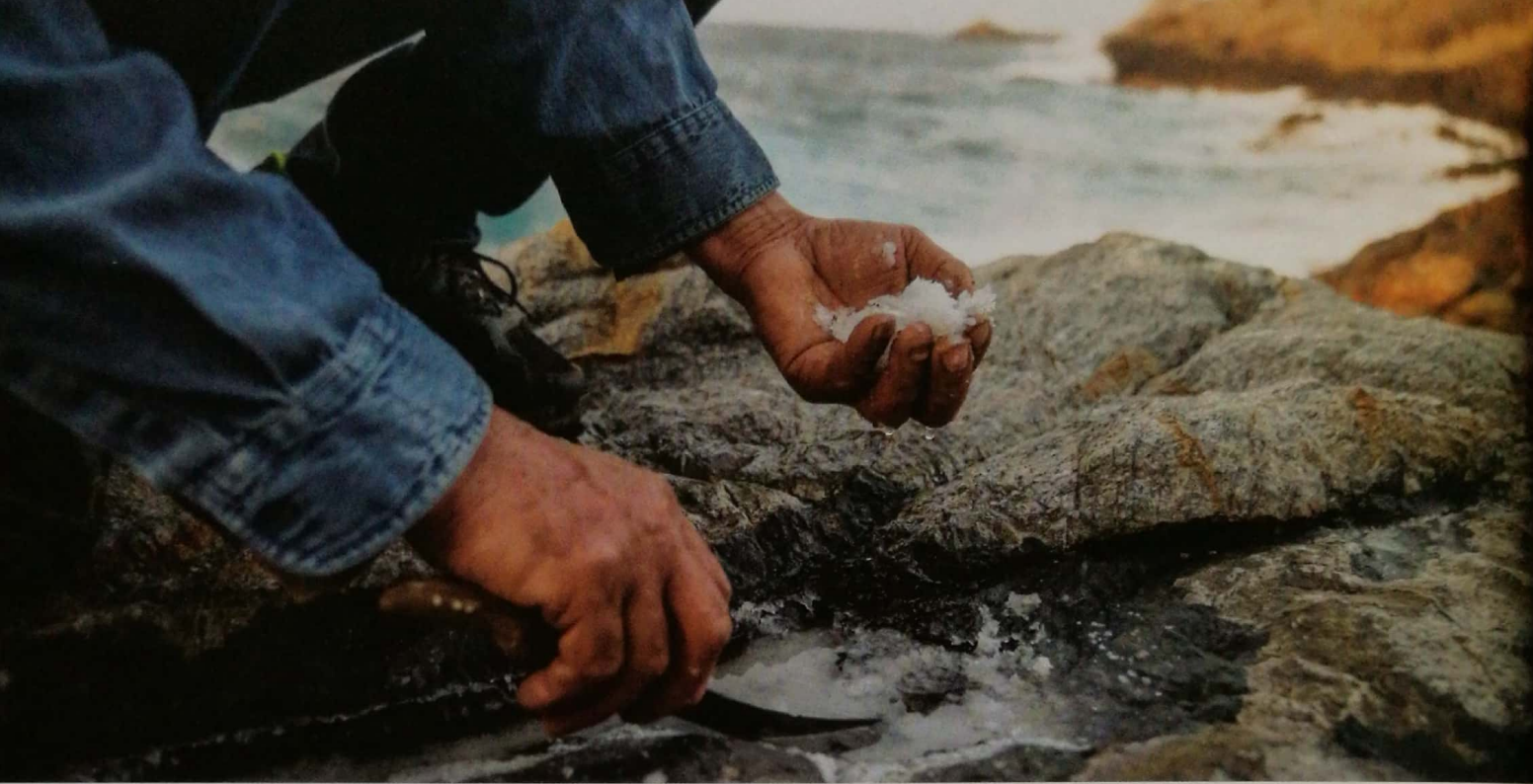
DAN BUETTNER

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID McLAIN



Shallots, fresh lemons, garlic, and herbs—the essential ingredients for many Ikarian dishes





In Ikaria, this is how many people gather salt—fresh from the sea, as it gets trapped in rocks.

grow wild throughout the island. Visit and you'll see women on the side of the road with a knife in one hand and a sack in the other, brimming with fennel fronds, parsley, samphire, wild dandelion, and chicory. Most look like the types of plants Americans would likely choose to whack. But these rich greens contain 10 times the antioxidants of red wine and make for delicious bites when boiled and baked into pies or added to salad.

And then there are the herbs: endemic oregano, thyme, rosemary, sage, and mint. These add a delightful, pungent flavor to foods; dried or fresh and infused in hot water, they offer a readily available and free daily beverage in the form of herbal tea. Used as medicines, they give your mind and digestive system a boost (rosemary), reduce stress (oregano), and relieve cold symptoms (sage). Most interestingly, when I sent samples of these herbs to the University of Athens for testing, I discovered that they are all anti-inflammatory and diuretic (which lowers blood pressure). The daily dosing of these herbs over a lifetime could explain the island's low rates of both heart disease and dementia. Moreover, some studies show that sage and rosemary specifically may trigger genes that help protect against dementia.

ON GEORGE AND ELENI KARIMALIS'S rolling vineyard located splendidly high above the Aegean, I watched Eleni, a kinetic culinary genius,

prepare a few of her specialties (mostly modified from her grandmother Helen's repertoire). She baked chickpeas (page 211), sweetened ever so lightly with grape syrup; baked a fennel pot pie (page 199) accented with mint; and milled dry bread, garlic, tarragon vinegar, and olive oil into a beguilingly delicious garlic spread (page 214). For dessert, she created pastries blending orange juice, olive oil, nutmeg, and flour to produce a confectioner's equivalent of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (honey cookies, page 227).

Eleni's grandmother taught her not to cook with olive oil, but rather to use it for finishing dishes; unheated olive oil, she said, tastes richer and fresher. Today we also know that olive oil used at too-high temperatures breaks the chains of polyunsaturated fats and makes them less healthy. Unknowingly, Eleni's grandmother was following her taste buds to healthier recipes.

For the chickpea dish, I watched Eleni "kill" onions by kneading them before baking with them; this way, they cooked easier, and caramelized into a sweet glaze. Also, baking beans—rather than stewing them—creates a browned crust that imparts a savory, almost meaty texture to the dish.

Eleni's husband, George, a severe, introspective man with bushy eyebrows and calloused hands, stood at my side during the entire demonstration. In the lulls between dishes, he offered his own time-honored advice gleaned from his ancestors:

- Make your meals special: Focus only on food and conversation
- Eat with people you love
- Drink a glass of wine with lunch and dinner
- Stop eating long before you feel full

An hour later, when Eleni served us her afternoon's production, it completely filled a colorful table. I was able to follow three of George's rules but failed the last one miserably. \*

## FLAVOR PROFILE

These flavor pairings form the backbone of Ikaria's most popular dishes. You can use these complementary combinations to help enhance any meal.

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dill + lemon + onion

dill + mint + garlic + olive oil

basil + garlic + tomatoes

lemon + olive oil + herbs

oregano + fennel + olive oil

garlic + olive oil + red wine vinegar



## Helen Mazari, 103 YEARS OLD

Eleni's 103-year-old grandmother ate dried bread, sage tea, honey, and olives for breakfast most mornings. Like other Ikarian centenarians, her close family ties, along with a diet rich in legumes, wild greens, and herbs are key to her long, healthy life. Helen has also

passed down her recipes and tradition of sharing meals with loved ones to her children and grandchildren. During our visit, she served us one of the most deliciously simple meals of our entire time in Ikaria: a simple soup of orzo and freshly picked tomatoes (page 194).



## HERBAL TEAS

Enjoying herbal tea is a daily ritual on Ikaria. Locals pick the many herbs that grow wild on the island to make their brews, which they often sweeten with honey. The common herbs act as mild diuretics and contain antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties, which help explain Ikaria's low rates of cardiovascular disease and dementia. Ikarians drink poppy tea as a mild relaxant; chicory teas for energy; rosemary tea for skin and digestion; thyme tea for allergy relief and coughs; sage teas for relaxation, colds, and as a natural Viagra; and mountain tea (the most common Greek herbal tea made from the *Sideritis* plant) for flu, headaches, and colds. To make your own, steep a few fresh herb sprigs (half the amount if using dried) in freshly boiled water then strain into a teapot or cup.





Fennel Pot Pie (previous page)







## WILD, LOCAL, AND SUN-DRIED

Ikaria's garden-to-table cooking is seasoned with high-quality, super-local ingredients such as their world-famous honey. Ikarians pick fresh herbs and vegetables from their gardens and forage wild greens and herbs from the island's rocky landscape. They sun dry herbs to enjoy in meals and medicinal teas. Wild greens and plants often contain a higher and wider variety of plant nutrients than commercially cultivated crops—and the hunt provides seekers with an opportunity for natural movement.





# PLANTS, WINE, AND PEOPLE

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With a rugged landscape, bright turquoise ocean views, and fields of vines and olive groves, Ikaria looks very similar to many other Greek islands. But Ikarians live much longer than other Greeks—and they live better, with much lower rates of heart disease, cancer, dementia, and depression. Because of their isolated locale, their traditional rhythms of village life, regular natural movement, and afternoon naps have been mostly unaffected by westernized customs and habits. Their food is also key in their longevity: They eat a distinct version of the Mediterranean diet that is heavier on beans, legumes, potatoes, honey, wild greens and herbs, fruit, and whole grains yet lighter on meat and fish than the diet of other Greeks.







# Eleni's Sourdough Bread

TOTAL COOK TIME: 4 HOURS | MAKES 6 SERVINGS

I learned this recipe from Eleni, an energetic, fast-talking 70-something-year-old with strong arms and a youthful face. As she was beating and kneading the dough, I could see that her exercise routine and level of fitness didn't come from spending hours in the gym.

Like Sardinia's sourdough bread, Ikaria's signature loaf harnesses the digestive power of wild yeast to break up simple sugars, eliminate much gluten, and produce a bread that will make your entire meal healthier. Studies show that true sourdough bread actually lowers the glycemic load of a meal, which is to say it slows the absorption of sugars into the blood. More importantly, this bread tastes delicious, so you'll want to eat it every day.

**2 cups sourdough starter,\*  
store-bought or homemade**

**1 cup room temperature water**

**3⅓ cups (1 pound) whole wheat  
flour**

**2¾ cups (1 pound) semolina flour**

**Pinch of salt and pepper**

**Sesame seeds (optional)**

In a very large bowl, mix starter and water together.

In another bowl, combine flours with salt and pepper.

Add the flour mixture, 1 cup at a time, to the water mixture, and stir thoroughly with each addition. Use your hands and continue to add flour until well combined.

Knead the dough for at least 20 minutes.

Plop dough into a low, round 20-inch pan and cover with olive oil; top with sesame seeds, if using.

Cut a small cross in the middle of the dough; then cover with a towel and let rise for 2 hours.

Bake in the oven for 20 minutes at 250 degrees, then 20 minutes at 200 degrees, and another 20 minutes at 180 degrees. This makes for a perfect loaf inside and out.

\*Baking with a sourdough starter (or wild yeast, a mixture of flour and water that's fermented) captures beneficial lactic acid bacteria and results in a healthier, tastier bread than if you were to use premade yeasts. The easiest way to make sourdough is to ask another baker for some starter. If that's not possible, make your own:


In a large glass jar with a lot of room, mix together 2 cups whole-wheat flour and 1½ cups water until it forms a thick liquid. Cover with cheesecloth or a paper towel and secure; keep on your kitchen counter away from direct sunlight. After 2 days, the starter will begin to rise and air bubbles will appear.

Scoop out three-quarters of the mixture and throw away. Add 1 cup whole-wheat flour and ½ cup water to the remaining mixture. Mix well. Cover again and set for 24 hours. Some foam will develop at the top when the starter is active and ready. Store it in the refrigerator.

You should feed your culture once a week if it's refrigerated by adding 1 cup flour and ½ cup water. Mix and let sit for an hour or two at room temperature before refrigerating again.







# Honey Cookies (Finikia)

TOTAL COOK TIME: 70 MINUTES | MAKES 24 COOKIES

I learned how to prepare this delicious treat from Eleni Karimalis, who showed me how to make traditional Ikarian specialties based on her grandmother's recipes in the scenic kitchen overlook of her rolling vineyard. It's rare to find a delicious cookie that doesn't use eggs or dairy, but this one won't disappoint. The result is a healthier, yet every bit as satisfying, dessert. It combines the tang of orange juice, the richness of nuts, and the sweet spiciness of cinnamon and honey. Ikarian wild honey is distinctive in its taste and its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties.

**¾ cup orange juice**

**¾ cup honey, plus more for drizzling**

**Juice from ½ lemon**

**1 tablespoon lemon zest**

**1 teaspoon vanilla**

**1½ ounces cognac or rum**

**¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**1 teaspoon baking soda**

**1 teaspoon baking powder**

**3½ cups all-purpose flour**

**Pinch of cloves**

**2 teaspoons cinnamon**

**1 teaspoon nutmeg**

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a large bowl, whisk together orange juice, honey, lemon juice, lemon zest, vanilla, and cognac or rum. Gradually drizzle in olive oil, whisking to combine.

In a separate bowl, combine baking soda, baking powder, flour, cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

Slowly add dry ingredient mixture to wet ingredients and stir until just combined. Do not overmix or knead, as the dough will become tough.

Let rest for 30 minutes at room temperature.

Roll dough into walnut-size balls and score with a fork. Place balls on a baking sheet, about an inch apart from each other.

Bake for 14-18 minutes, or until golden.

Drizzle with honey, if desired.