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NEWS

New Hellenic Center for Excellence in Health and Wellness (/index.php/en/news/477-new-hellenic-center-for-excellence-in-health-and-wellness)

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The Hellenic Center for Excellence in Health & Wellness is being established as a non-profit in the USA to sponsor research and educational programs in Crete, Greece in partnership with the Grecotel hotel chain. The goal is to increase awareness of the health benefits of the traditional Cretan diet and lifestyle, starting with an autumn conference in Crete.

"The center will be a US non-profit, with a US-based board of

directors and US and international advisors in three areas: science/health, agro-culinary issues, and business/innovation. **Advised by world-famous scientists and gastronomy experts** from Harvard, Yale and other leading universities, **the center will offer hands-on immersion experiences in Crete,**" Dr. Stefanos Kales explained to Greek Liquid Gold. Kales, who is a Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and a Professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, is the founder of the center and its CEO and Chief Scientific Officer.

Kales was inspired by a collaboration between the Culinary Institute of America and the University of Barcelona, who together created a center for the Mediterranean diet. Kales told Isabella Zambetaki (<https://www.ekathimerini.com/society/1189272/cretans-know-a-thing-or-two-about-good-living/>), "As a third generation Greek, ... I wanted to find a way to establish something similar in Greece." As he explained to Greek Liquid Gold, his proposal was embraced by Grecotel, **the Greek Minister of Tourism, the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTA), the Governor of Crete,** and the president of the association of travel agents of Crete. According to Kales, "all of the authorities trusted in the gravitas and high caliber of the advisors, while they had confidence in the experience and resources of Grecotel as an in-country strategic partner."

In a presentation at the Aristotle Medical Forum in Thessaloniki (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lxK0NHd23g>), Kales pointed out that the collaboration with Grecotel, a major Greek luxury hotel chain, makes it unnecessary to seek funding to build a conference center. It also supports the Greek government's goals of **expanding wellness tourism and year-round tourism.** This November's conference will already extend one hotel's active period beyond the typical tourist season, and next year the center hopes to pilot wellness tourism services in collaboration with Grecotel.

Long established on Crete and now prominent throughout Greece, Grecotel includes 40 award-winning luxury hotels and resorts in beachfront locations. Kales was especially impressed by Grecotel's organic agrotourism farm in Crete, Agreco Farm, as well as the company's longstanding dedication to environmental sustainability "and the close connection of the company with the agri-food sector," as he told Zambetaki, since one goal of the Hellenic Center for Excellence in Health & Wellness is to provide "**sustainable experiences**" that highlight the traditional Cretan diet and lifestyle. Set up like a traditional village, Agreco Farm offers a tour, plus activities and demonstrations that include milking goats, beekeeping, and traditional cooking and baking.

Crete's mild, sunny climate makes it an excellent choice as a base for the center, as members of the advisory committee confirmed last spring. In May, the establishment of the Hellenic Center for Excellence in Health & Wellness was officially announced at an invitation-only symposium on the value of olive oil and the Mediterranean diet at the Vatican in Rome, where Kales and a number of other advisory committee members were featured speakers. Immediately following the symposium, they visited Crete to gain **first-hand experience with the Cretan diet and lifestyle in the land where it developed over the centuries**. Visiting Agreco Farm, a winery, and artisanal food producers, enjoying Greek Orthodox fasting cuisine at a monastery, and speaking with local producers, the scientists were able to "directly experience the results of the Seven Countries Study," as Kales told Zambetaki.

Kales explained this in his Thessaloniki presentation: "Historically, **what we call the Mediterranean diet is really based on the Cretan diet**," as the Rockefeller Report (1953) and Ancel Keys's Seven Countries Study (1970) indicated. "Crete was the star of the study" in the latter case, "with the longest life expectancy, and the lowest rates of heart disease, as well as cancer." For what Ancel Keys later called the Mediterranean diet, "the gold standard, the prototype, was the Cretan diet and the traditional Greek diet." Now, Kales added, "the so-called Mediterranean diet" is considered "the healthiest eating pattern for almost everyone in every country." The US government joins many others in recommending it.

This is not only about food, as Kales pointed out in his presentation; lifestyle is also crucial for our health. So **the new center "seeks to advance healthier food and lifestyle choices worldwide, using the traditions and history of the Cretan diet** as the gold standard reference point for learning and research" in various educational offerings and "hands-on immersion experiences in Greece." An international team of prestigious scientific and culinary advisors is sharing their expertise with the center, enabling interdisciplinary research and education on nutrition, olives, olive oil, and wine.

The center's advisory committee will seek to **develop partnerships with Greek and foreign institutions and universities, and with local producers of traditional products** in Crete. As Kales told Greek Liquid Gold, they would be glad to hear suggestions from the community in Crete about research projects that could help preserve traditional practices and improve nutrition and wellness on the island. Moreover, they "would be happy to engage with local producers to discuss with them any type of sponsorship, logistical or technical partnerships," or other contributions.

This will all start with **an inaugural experiential conference at Creta Palace Resort in Rethymno this November entitled "Cretan Lifestyle: Mediterranean Tradition & Modern Applications."** As Kales said in his presentation, conference participants will "see, they will hear, they will taste, they will try, and they will live unique and unforgettable experiences in Crete, inspired by the land of Crete, the people, their history, and their legendary hospitality." They will also learn from experts (<https://mediterraneanhealth.org/about-us/>) from Harvard, Yale, the Culinary Institute of America, the PREDIMED study, Spain, and Greece. This "hands-on, mouth-watering immersion course on the health benefits of the traditional Mediterranean Lifestyle (<https://mediterraneanhealth.org/>)" is open to all: students, professionals, foodies, chefs, producers, exporters (</index.php/en/more/conferences-classes/478-proposals-welcome-for-november-med-diet-conference-in-crete>), and wellness enthusiasts.

Plans for immersion experiences include visits to wineries, olive groves/mills, a cheese maker, a monastery, and Agreco Farm. The preliminary program calls for **the following sessions:**

- Crete: From Past to Present
- Lifestyle Medicine and Medical Tourism
- Spirituality and Health (from Orthodox Christian Fasting to Mindful Eating)
- Prevention of Dementia and Cognitive Decline
- PREDIMED / PREDIMED PLUS Updates
- Young Investigators and Professionals (Poster and Presentation Competition) (</index.php/en/more/conferences-classes/478-proposals-welcome-for-november-med-diet-conference-in-crete>)
- Making Greek Products Successful in the US Market
- Phenols and Antioxidants

See you in Crete?

Greek Liquid Gold readers, you can **take advantage of an extra discount if you register for the Cretan Lifestyle conference by October 15 using this (case-sensitive) code: (<https://mediterraneanhealth.org/registration/>) GLG2022**. In that case, the total for a room at the 5-star luxury resort the nights of November 7-11, full board, registration, receptions, and conference excursions, including fees, will come to \$981.88 US, almost \$80 less than the Early Bird rate (with its fees) and more than \$610 less than the regular price!

Thanks to Dr. Stefanos Kales for the photos that appear with this article.

Greekliquidgold.com is a Technical Partner for the Cretan Lifestyle: Mediterranean Tradition & Modern Applications experiential conference.

All businesses, organizations, and competitions involved with Greek olive oil, the Mediterranean diet, and/or agrotourism or food tourism in Greece, as well as others interested in supporting Greeks working in these sectors, are invited to consider the advertising and sponsorship opportunities on the Greek Liquid Gold: Authentic Extra Virgin Olive Oil website (</index.php/en/advertise>). The only wide-ranging English-language site focused on news and information from the Greek olive oil world, it has helped companies reach consumers in more than 220 countries around the globe.