

**International Palette: A Multi-Sensory Experience as a Food Critic**

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Upon entering Lefteris Gyro III, the aroma of fresh herbs, lamb and cheese is distinct. The sounds of soothing music playing lightly in the background can be quickly identified as Greek music. This fast paced Greek restaurant located in the Ridge Hill Shopping Center in Yonkers, New York is the epitome of what an authentic Greek Restaurant should be. The hostess approaches and politely asks how many people are to be seated and whether outside dining or indoor dining was preferred. After deciding on indoor dining, she proceeds to show the table. The hostess was dressed in casual attire but was still presentable and appropriate. Due to the CoronaVirus pandemic spreading throughout America, many restaurants have suffered the repercussions of little to no business. With that being said, there were no reservations required and no wait to be seated.

Regardless of the restaurant not being as busy as it typically would be on a Friday night, the atmosphere and ambiance within the restaurant made the dining experience enjoyable. The concept of the restaurant follows a Mediterranean theme that is immediately noticeable and catches one's eye. The walls are painted aquamarine blue, similar to waters of the stunning Greek beaches. (See Image 1) The table cloths were made of a checkered royal blue and white, meant to represent the colors of the Greek flag. The waiters and waitresses were dressed in a royal Greek blue button up top and black slacks. Most of the waitstaff were identified as Greek which was determined by their side conversations in their native tongue. The waiters strong scent of cologne was distinguishing along with his arm sleeve tattoos. In addition to their attire and dress, many of the wait staff wore Orthodox crosses on their necklaces which is common in the Greek culture. Their attire is professional yet still follows the theme of the restaurant making the ambiance flow and come together. Lefteris Gyro is designed with immediate attention and eye grabbing cultural

features that can identify it as a authentic Greek restaurant it and differentiate it from most Greek-Americanized restaurants or establishments.

Once being seated, a one-time use menu is placed on the table. Due to COVID-19, reusable menus are not given to prevent spreading the virus. (See Image 2) The majority of the menu consists of a wide range of traditional and authentic Greek options that are not often seen at American restaurants and might even be considered unusual for some. For instance, Gigandes, which is a traditional bean stew, Avgolemono, which is a traditional Greek soup consisting of egg yolk, and steamed cabbage stuffed with ground beef or rice, nuts, raisins. The menu consists of seafood, meat, salads, soups, sandwiches, and desserts. Additionally, the restaurant offers vegetarian dishes and a kids menu. The restaurant's menu describes most of the menu options, what they are, and what the main ingredients are. The name's of the food's are in Greek but the descriptions are in English to help people of other nationalities better understand the food. Along with the menu, a sheet of paper with the Greek map is placed for each person. The paper gives a brief history of Greek civilization, including information like the capital city, official language, population, etc.. (see image 3)

The waiter, Panos, approaches and greets the guests with traditional warm pita bread and their refreshing Tzatziki dip. Pita bread is essential at a Greek dinner. It can be eaten with many other traditional Greek foods such as spreads, olives, meat and cheeses. The pita was warm to the touch and the guests were given a generous amount. The Tzatziki has a cooling and refreshing taste with a zesty aftertaste. The texture is creamy and has an overpowering cucumber scent.

Beverages are then offered, along with an option of seeing the wine, liquor or beer menu. A popular Greek liquor, known Ouzo, was provided as an option for a choice of liquor. Ouzo is a type of moonshine that is widely consumed in Greece. It is extremely strong, with a 96% level of

alcohol content, according to our waiter Panos. Ouzo is not often found on many menus, especially American chains. To get the full Greek experience, a *Tuvunu* (Greek Iced Tea) was ordered as a beverage. *Tuvunu* is Greek mountain tea and is known to have beneficial health factors. It contains natural spring water, wild honey, fresh lemons and organic sugar. The tea has a very distinctive taste and bitter smell that is much different than a traditional American tea.

Subsequent to ordering beverages, for appetizers, a flaming hot *Saganaki* was brought over. *Saganaki* is a sizzling fried cheese made of Feta cheese that is flambé'd with lemon and brandy. The flaming cheese was brought over while still in flames which was interesting to see since it is not very common in American restaurants. (see image 4) The *Saganaki* is meant to be eaten while it is hot, and could be eaten with pita bread as a cheese sandwich. The overall taste of the cheese could be considered to be mild but is still highly flavored with the sharp taste of vinegar that comes from Feta which can also be easily recognized by the scent.

Along with *Saganaki*, an order of Fried Squid, also known as Fried Calamari, was ordered for the table. Seafood is a big part of the Greek cuisine and culture and is often fried. The Fried Calamari is served with half a lemon as an option to drizzle and give it a tangy taste along with a small side of marinara sauce for dipping. (see image 5) There was not much of a scent except a scent of fried oil, a light but pleasant fish smell, and the smell of acidic lemon. The calamari consists of a savory flavor. The texture is first very crunchy and crispy. Once through the top layer of crisp, there is a chewy texture which is the texture of the squid.

Once finishing the appetizers, the entree quickly arrived. The scent of the dish followed from the kitchen, through the dining room, and at the table. The scent of the entire dish is overpowered by the lamb meat which has a very particular taste and scent which could in fact be considered an acquired taste. For a main dish, a traditional platter, known as *The Mixed Grill* for

(2) arrived to the table. *The Mixed Grill* consists of five different meats served over French Fries. In addition to this, it comes with a generous side of Greek Salad and additional pita bread. The five meats consist of gyro lamb meat, chicken, pork sausage, bifteki, and lamb kabob. (see image 6) The platter was filled to the capacity of the plate. Seeing the platter once placed on the table was enough to make one feel full before even taking a bite. The delicious smell of the lean meats and french fries was mouth watering. All five meats were grilled and had plenty of flavor. The predominant ingredient once taking that first bite was the taste of oregano seasoning. The meat was tender enough to pull apart by hand and chew on.

While working on the main dish, the delicious Greek Salad side completed the whole meal. (see image 7) The Greek Salad is the restaurant's traditional salad that is offered as a side for many of the dishes. The salad is a typical Greek Salad consisting of lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, red onion and *dolma*. What differentiates the Lefteris Gyro Greek Salad from an Americanized Greek Salad are the dolma. Dolma are grape leaves stuffed with rice and are often found in the Balkans and Middle East. The Greek Salad had a crunchy and pungent taste and smell which went well with the meat platter.

For dessert, the menu offered a variety of Greek sweets, desserts and coffees. Some traditional desserts offered were Baklava, Rice Pudding, Ktaifi Ekmek and Galaktoboureko. Also, a Greek Frappe and Greek Coffee was listed on the menu. These options set Lefteris Gyro III apart from many restaurants being that they are not often found on most dessert or coffee menus. After dinner, the Baklava was brought to the table. The delicious and sweet dessert was fresh and crunchy. (see image 8) Like many other Greek desserts, some of the main ingredients in the Baklava are walnuts and honey. Their desserts are generally very sweet and custard like and the coffees are very strong and overpowering.

Greece is a South Eastern European peninsular country bordering the Ionian and Mediterranean Sea. It is surrounded by beautiful waters with an archipelago of about two thousand islands.(Greeka) In addition to this, Greece is also known to be a primarily mountainous nation with nearly three hundred mountains, both big and small.(VisitGreece) With that being said, throughout history Greek people have relied heavily on the sea and land to provide food and feed their families. As shown on Lefteris Gyro III's menu, representing a Greek diet, the majority of the food options were either fish or meat such as chicken, lamb, pork, beef, etc.. Greek food is very well known and favored by many throughout America. In Astoria, New York, there are many Greek establishments that serve authentic Greek food, drinks, desserts and even grocery stores that bring food from overseas. Greek food has also had an influence on Greece's neighboring countries such as Albania, Macedonia and Turkey where many of the dishes are similar to those in Greece.

Olive Oil is a predominant ingredient used in Greek food for centuries. It has been pressed into oil to use for cooking since ancient times. Olive trees in Greece have a long and deep history and were once treasured by Gods and Goddesses. "In Greek mythology, Athena won the patronage of Athens from Poseidon with the gift of an olive tree, because it is a symbol of peace." (Yujun, 2019) Every part of an olive tree is considered to be important. For centuries, the leaves of the tree were used as medicine to cure minor flus and colds. Today, olive trees are grown throughout Greece and still are a valued product.

The overall experience at Lefteris Gyro III was very good and a B. The food, service, price, cleanliness and authenticity were excellent. The restaurant followed proper COVID-19 precautions. All of the wait staff wore masks and gloves properly, customers were required to wear masks properly, social distancing was being practiced and menus were not being reused.

The bathrooms were clean and neat, service was up to par and authenticity was accurate. The food was absolutely delicious and the subtle Greek music in the background completed the ambiance made the dining experience enjoyable. The decor might have been a little overpowering with the excessive use of deep blue and the quality of meat's used was questionable. However, the price did reflect quality and it was not meant to be a fine dining experience. The experience was very informing and the waitstaff contributed to making sure guests have a good understanding of what each food is before ordering.

Images



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 7



Image 6



Image 8

## Citations

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\*all photos were taken by me\*