

Greece Day One: Papagiannakos!

Posted by Winn Robertson | Posted in Grape Adventures | Posted on 06-03-2013

After 16 hours of transatlantic travel with screaming babies, no sleep, and little sustenance, I was ready for bed. It was, after all, 2 a.m.

Or at least it felt that way. It was actually 10 a.m. and I had a full day of climbing ancient ruins and tasting wine in front of me. Yikes. Fortunately, the Greek have heard of espresso.

It was at the Sofitel Athens — directly across the street from the airport — where I met up with 14 other wine personalities in the same destitute emotional state, yet all abuzz about embarking on the tour of a lifetime. Some came from as far as San Diego, so I certainly couldn't complain about jet leg.



The Acropolis.

Luckily, our hosts, Sofia and George from [New Wines of Greece](#), were ready for us.

We started with a cab ride to the Acropolis, a can't miss when in Athens — even if you're only there for a day and your positively exhausted. Also, be sure to get a tour guide. Ours was passionately Greek, and there's not much direction for guests who are on their own.

After gorging on some street food and taking a brief break at the hotel, we headed to [Papagiannakos Estate](#) just north of Athens in Attica, for a tasting of wines from Central Greece and Evia. (Evia is the island adjacent to mainland Greece — you may need a microscope to see that it's actually an island and not another peninsula.)

In looking over the whole itinerary prior to the trip, I thought this might be the weakest tasting of the trip. If this proves to be the case, wow. Of the 40 wines tasted, there was some definite quality. The kicker is that several of them cost less than \$13.

A few of the highlights and more impressions are detailed below the fold. Next up, Santorini!



2012 Strofilia "Diadromes" Malagouzia

Strofilia is Greek for basket-press. A grape I've been surprised by a lot recently. This wine shows a slight honeyed character with ripe yellow apples and an silky/tangy mouthfeel. 30% new French oak, plus battonage. \$6.55

2012 Mylonas Savatiano

The grape that has kept Central Greece's wine industry on the map, much in part to its contribution to Retsina. A grape hat I find usually lacking acid, finds a nice home here with creamy stone fruit notes and a certain animale character,

Baby Greco di Tufo vines at Papagiannakos Estate. perhaps from the 25% wild fermentation. \$5.00

2009 Vrinitos "Iama" Evia red.

A blend of 50 percent Vradiano and 50 percent Syrah. Ah, of course the one grape I hadn't heard of yielded an awesome wine. It's indigenous to Evia and the winemaker didn't know of any plantings elsewhere. The wine is smoky, savory, salty, slightly meaty. Lean with medium to medium-plus acid. Iama is Greek for "cure." \$7.00

2007 Costa Lazaridi Syrah/Agiorgitiko.

Say it with me, EYE-ORE-YEE-TEE-KOH. Got it? Good. This is a big wine from the coastal mainland near Marathon. 14-15% alcohol with ripe bursting dark fruit, some sweet barrique notes and garrigue undertone from the development in bottle. Not your typical Greek bottle, but it would get the job done in many U.S. steakhouses. Also, the most expensive bottle of the day. \$19.00

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A few things I took away from this and other recent encounters with Greek wine:

Cabernet struggles. I've run into it all alone and blended with Agiorgitiko, a lighter, fresher grape that is beautiful in its home in Nemea, and it just doesn't seem like a match. One notable is the 2007 Hatzimichalis "Kapnias Vineyard." We'll visit Nemea in a few days, so perhaps I'll eat my words then.

Malagouzia, a white Greek grape that was thought to be extinct until recently, is awesome. In the late 20th century, Domaine Carras in Northern Greece began to cultivate this ancient variety with the help of University of Bordeaux Professor Emile Peynaud. It's been a favorite of mine at several recent tastings.

Retsina, the historical Greek wine aromatized with pine resin, does exist. Day one of my trip was the first time I actually tasted this style of wine — and while the examples I sampled used far less pine resin than they're allowed to by law (thus allowing the wine to show), they still weren't my thing. They were rather flat, herbal and odd. And frankly, I wasn't going to even bring up my tasting of Retsina until I saw [Christopher Bates recent post on twitter](#) seeking advice on what to pair with "a new roasted onion dish with house chèvre and faro." This could be a dish where Retsina would work! (While you're on twitter, be sure to congratulate Chris on becoming one of the newest Master Sommeliers.)