

Act Locally, Promote Globally

All It Takes is a Visionary or Two

Good morning ladies and Gentlemen. Kostas, thank you for inviting me. Don't worry, I will not speak to you in Greek today. (Spoken in Greek.)

Forty years ago, Greece was the most progressively marketed destination in Europe, and maybe, in the world. In the late 1970s, the Greek Tourist Organization came under the visionary guidance of Tzannis Tzannetakis. He began by taking some rather creative decisions and prescient steps in developing Greece's young tourism product. And those choices have even more applications and resonance today.

Today's travelers – and I speak about the American ones – are looking for authentic experiences, as you have heard. Authenticity is the buzz word in travel today. They want to explore the history and culture of a country – and of course the traditional food of a destination is an essential part of that experience.

In my brief time today, I want to talk about some successes Greece's tourism has had and individuals – visionaries really – who have made a difference. And I want to make the case for the power of the individual to initiate change.

Hillary Clinton coined the phrase “It Takes a Village.” Today I'm going to talk about how sometimes in tourism promotion...

It takes A Visionary

Some 40 years ago, Tzannetakis realized that authenticity was the key – that visitors would come to his country to visit the ancient Greek temples, Roman ruins and medieval monasteries and would pay to stay in authentic historic buildings.

Traditional settlements – *paradosiaki ikismi* – In the late 1970s, the Greek National Tourist Organization began identifying medieval towers in the Mani, cave houses in Santorini, some old mansions in Chios and Pelion – even entire villages that had been deserted – and converting them into accommodations. The program was designed to preserve these historic buildings and to encourage the flow of travelers to less-visited parts of the country. You remember yesterday Professor Jafari told us

about Britain's prime minister Cameron wanting to spread tourism growth.

At that same time, Tzannetakis as Minister of Tourism directed the Greek National Tourist Organization to hire a professional marketing company to promote Greece's tourism product. GNTO chose an award-winning company – one of New York's most dynamic and innovative advertising and PR agencies. The company, AC&R, a division of Ted Bates, designed a revolutionary (for the time) campaign. Their integrated multi-faceted marketing program – combining advertising, trade relations, trade shows and public relations – established Greece as one of the most enticing destinations in the world. To my knowledge, it was the first country to market itself so effectively and intelligently.

By the late 1970s and into the mid 1980s, Greece was receiving 600,000 Americans, while countries like Italy and France were receiving far less.

Today? 25 years later, Greece is barely receiving 250,000-300,000 Americans. How is the competition doing? Well, the UK welcomes 4 to 5 million Americans. Italy receives 4.5 to 4 million, France receives about 4 million American visitors, Germany gets 3.5 million and even Holland receives 3 million

Americans. Studies undertaken by the European Travel Commission and various European government tourism ministries show that Americans spend two to three times what their European counterparts spend traveling in those countries. When I compare those numbers, I remember what Greek politician once said – years ago – Greece should not be a nation of waiters. Well obviously other European destinations disagreed.

What happened? Quite simply a lack of promotion and marketing. And in many cases, ineffective promotional campaigns directed by government bureaucrats who were not experts in marketing and tourism. But I'm not here to talk about the mistakes of the past.

I want to talk about successes and some of the other visionaries I have known. These people all happen to be connected with food. I am going to present some examples of the importance of getting the word out and how that can be done in markets around the world – as long as you have a good story.

Marketing and public relations professionals need something to promote...

In the early days of Greek tourism back in the 60s and 70s, you all remember what was on the menu – there was spaghetti, spaghetti and spaghetti. *Macaronia me salsa tomata*. And even with arguably the best tomatoes in the world – it was not always very good spaghetti.

Twenty five years ago this year, George Hatziyannakis opened Selene, with his wife Evelyn, with the intention of presenting traditional – and well prepared – dishes using local products so that visitors could experience a taste of Santorini's Cycladic island culture.

Early on, George was a leading advocate for Slow Food on the Greek food scene, encouraging local farmers, wine makers, fishermen and cheese makers. It took time, of course, but over several years, the reputation of Selene began to grow. Why? Because they understood the power of public relations to spread the word. George was always welcoming to journalists, other chefs and brother restaurateurs.

In working with EOT in the early 1990s, an essential element of our campaign was to bring journalists to Greece to show them firsthand various aspects of the country.

Every time I sent or brought journalists to Selene, I knew that they would have an incredibly hospitable experience – after all this was Greece – the birthplace of *filoxenia*. I also knew I was providing them with a news story. They had the opportunity to learn about a new – to them – cuisine and they all came away raving about Greece’s culinary arts.

Initially cruise ships brought the visitors to Santorini. Later, good restaurants made them come back to stay. At the same time, luxury boutique hotels - like Iliotopos and Astra – began springing up to welcome free-spending tourists. And then, small wineries, growing the island’s indigenous *assyritko* grape, began producing world class wines. It was a perfect example of how a cluster gathers.

And needless to say, over the years George continued to win rave reviews and awards from all over the world.

Last year not content to sit on his laurels, George made a major change – He moved his restaurant from Fira with its iconic views of the caldera where he had been for 24 years – inland to the traditional village of Pyrgos. Some thought he was crazy. But again, George was thinking about the food. In his new Selene, in a beautifully restored 19th century mansion next to the island’s ethnological museum – the focus is totally on the food and a new menu – but still using the indigenous Santorini products – the island’s capers, the white eggplants and those delicious baby tomatoes.

In the 1980’s, Rosemary Barron, an English food writer who had been visiting Crete for 15 years, opened Kandra Kitchen, a cooking school near Hersonissos outside of Iraklion. It was, I believe, the first cooking school of international standard in Greece.

France, of course, had several cooking schools, including the Cordon Blue, which at that time was more of a finishing school. Besides a few mom and pop cooking classes, Italy had two schools run by Marcella Hazan and Guiliano Bugialli, but Kandra Kitchen on Crete was the first internationally-recognized school in Greece.

And this period coincided with a time in which American journalists were becoming excited about Mediterranean cuisine. As part of our public relations campaign for Greece, we suggested to the Greek Tourist Organization that we organize a trip to Greece for prominent food writers and visit this new cooking school. We selected some of the top “foodies,” editors, cookbook authors, established figures in the culinary world, who wrote about French, Italian – even Moroccan food. We brought Paula Wolfert and Lorna Sass. Barbara Kafka writing in Vogue called Kandra Kitchen “one of the world’s top three cooking schools.”

In 1991, Rosemary published the best-selling *Flavors of Greece* which was hailed by the *New York Times* and listed as one of the top cookbooks by several newspapers in Britain.

That same year in October, three Greek chefs – Sotiris Kitrilakis, Chris Veneris, Angel Stoyianof – along with Rosemary spearheaded and organized a seminal event. *The Foods and Wines of Greece*, a symposium in Porto Carras, drew other chefs, restaurant owners, wine makers, academics, olive oil producers and cheese makers from across Greece. It was an amazing spectacle. Gorgeous fresh produce was laid out in sumptuous displays. Pita makers from Metsovo, cheese makers from Ios, olive oil producers from Kalamata – all gathered to discuss Greek food. Professors gave lectures about

the diet of the Greeks from Classical to Byzantine times and on to the Mediterranean Diet. Attendees dined on Classical Greek menus, Byzantine specialties and regional dishes from Macedonia, Epirus and the Cyclades.

The buzz had started – suddenly Greek food was becoming known.

In 1979 in Montreal, Costas Spiliades opened a small one room taverna, called Milos. In a few years, it had evolved in to one of the city's most elegant restaurants introducing Canadians to a sophisticated fine Greek dining experience. Those words were not often used in combination. Later, Costas opened Milos in New York and I can attest to the high quality of the food – and the fact that it is packed every night with happy clients paying \$100 a person. In 2003, Costas opened Milos in the Athens Hilton and brought the same high quality Greek dining experience to Greece's capital. Last month, Costas opened a new Milos in Las Vegas and he is debuting yet another in Miami soon.

Another important figure in taking Greece's cuisine to higher plane and attracting international attention for it was Lefteris Lazarou of Varoulko. I remember when I first brought some

American writers to Piraeus. We had lunch at an open-air fish taverna in Microlimano. That evening we dined at Varoulko, a sleek, art-filled contemporary restaurant, and we said to ourselves – this would be a smash in Manhattan. And the journalists saw two sides of the Greek dining experience. They got a story.

There are others – my friends Aris and Lia Dimitrakopoulos opened the Andromeda – one of the first boutique hotels in Athens along with the Pentelikon and brought a new level of service to the city. They cared about food and by the way, the hotel had a fantastic Greek breakfast.

Most recently there was another visionary who truly thought on a grand scale. Vassili Constantakopoulos. I was sorry to hear he passed away last week. But he will be remembered for the magnificent Costa Navarino resort. Captain Vassilis wanted to promote Messenia and at the same time preserve the area's natural beauty. Some of the ideas we heard yesterday – encouraging local farmers, sourcing local products – have been employed here. They are even using olive oil – from Gaia – in the spa.

So we know Greece has visionaries. But you can have all the visionaries in the world, and if no one hears about the great things they are doing...

You Need to Promote Globally

In the early 1990s I introduced Anya von Bremzen, a fledging food writer to Greece. We drove around Crete for a week dining in charming tavernas and meeting local chefs. She published a glowing 4-page article in Travel + Leisure. For the past 10 years, Anya has written at least ten multi-page articles every year in Travel + Leisure and Food & Wine about ... Spanish cuisine. During my seven years working with the Tourist Office of Spain, I invited Anya several times a year to visit. She also spent a year living in Istanbul and has become known as an authority on Turkish cuisine.

Anya has not been back to Greece since our first visit almost 20 years ago.

There are two people in this room who have worked diligently to keep the flame of knowledge about Greek cuisine alive in America's food and travel magazines. If not for Diane Kochilas and Aglaia Kremezi, coverage of Greek food in North America

would have all but disappeared. Diane, especially, has been the “go to” expert on Greek cuisine for the American media – telling the Greek food story.

What has the competition been doing? For the past 30 years Spain has consistently been promoting its tourism in the U.S. And the individual regions in cooperation with the central government have joined forces, combining budgets. Every two months Valencia, Catalonia or Andalusia comes to New York with a chef or three – they invite the media and the travel industry and show off the region’s cuisine. Spain has a consistent message and the Spanish make it fun and enjoyable.

Albert Arouh told us yesterday how some of Spain’s chefs like Arzak and Ferran Adria sparked a food revolution, and in the process, made Spain a sought-after travel destination. Twenty years ago, an article appeared on the cover of the New York Times Magazine – “Spain, the New France,” speaking about the culinary revolution and that helped put the country on the world food map.

Italy. Notoriously disorganized. Its regions come to visit the US regularly hosting writers and travel agents over delicious meals of regional specialties.

France has been on the world tourism map for 50 years. It is the top country in the world for tourism – drawing 74 million visitors last year. Twenty years ago the French Government Tourist Office gathered the regions together under Maison de La France and required each one to contribute to France’s marketing campaign.

We have all heard about the sharp cuts Britain is making. But since they have some big events coming up – the Royal Wedding next year, the Olympics after that – Visit Britain just announced last week they are accepting partners for their marketing campaign and have already signed up two airlines, two major hotel groups and a rental car company.

Closer to the US, the Cayman Islands – 3 tiny spits of sand in the Caribbean had no food tradition. They were very Americanized with MacDonald’s and Burger Kings. They made a strategic decision to market themselves as a food destination. They invited some famous chefs from New York – Eric Ripert of Le Bernardin, Thomas Keller of Per Se, Daniel Boulud to come to

the island for a food festival. At the same time local Caymanians started planting gardens. They ran TV commercials heavily promoting it... and, voila! Five years later people are talking about it as a food destination.

Now more than ever in today's world with its 24/7 news cycle – travelers are getting their information from so many different sources. Friends, word of mouth, of course, the traditional media – newspapers and magazines. Television has exploded with hundreds of networks and thousands of channels. And, then there is social media.

Yesterday, Chris Brauer gave us an excellent overview.

Facebook Twitter YouTube Flickr

It's never been easier to get your message out there and in a way – it's never been harder to ensure the message is reaching the right audience.

In speaking about tourism marketers, Chris said something very insightful. They should think about **The Why**.

What's **The Why** for Greece? And it got me thinking.

What's been the constant for me after almost 40 years of visiting Greece – more than 80 times?

It has to do with the people – the *philoxenia* – and of course food is a part of that.

My friends George and Heleni Theodorakopoulos welcomed me in Greece every year for 30 years – and always had a table of special dishes waiting for me. They even would greet me at the old airport with a bowl of *gigantes* after a particularly hard-partying weekend in Mykonos.

Greece is still the same wonderful country I saw on my first visit forty years ago. It is one of the world's most beautiful places (and I've traveled to 45 countries). It has the most hospitable people anywhere on the planet. And it still has a great food story to tell – which will entice more travelers to come.

Greece needs to get organized and get out there and tell that to the world – in a way that today's travelers will understand.

Individual visionaries can only do so much – they need the help of the community, the region and the government to promote in international markets.

Yesterday we heard a lot about systems and structure and about building the BRAND – now those are all legitimate discussion points, but in true American fashion

Let me leave you with one expression from a successful American brand.

JUST DO IT

Thank you.