

# Greece is the word

Darwin's energetic Greek community has led to some very enticing restaurants around town. By MELINDA BARLOW

GREECE'S recent economic turmoil has seen a spike in Greek arrivals to the Top End, contributing to a renaissance of food culture in Darwin.

Today, about 10 per cent of Darwin's population is Greek and thanks to a great work ethic, local restaurateurs are ensuring there is no shortage of places to eat out.

There are more than half a dozen Greek owned cafes, bakeries and restaurants in town, from institutions like Yots at Cullen Bay and Manoli's in Smith St, to the newer players; Antiquity at the Waterfront Precinct, Zorba's in Knuckey St and Cafe Del'Art in Mitchell St. Not to mention Darwin's best-kept secret, Dimitrios' Greek bakery in Alawa.

Manoli Papathomas' beloved restaurant, Manoli's Greek Taverna is a focal point for many in the community.

All six members of the Papathomas family work there including Manoli's parents and sisters. Manoli is committed to using quality ingredients and providing authentic Greek food, just like in his hometown of Kalymnos.

Manoli has noticed a lot of new faces in the community in recent years: "There were a lot of older Greeks that went home in the '80s and '90s because things were going well in Greece. Now that things have gone belly up they are returning to Darwin. They worry for their kids' futures and know they get a better future here. So now we are seeing all the old faces back again".

Well-known identity, Lilliane Gomatos, has also watched the Greek community change over the years. As one of the founding members of the Greek Glenti, she is the go-to person for all the happenings in GreekTown.

Lilliane has seen many Greeks come and go but knows

the positive impact the Glenti has on the on the community:

"As an ethnic group we came up with the idea to have a Greek festival and the Glenti was born. Last year we celebrated 25 years."

The event offers new migrants and locals the chance to connect Greek home-style traditions and food.

All the stalls are run by clubs associated with the Greek community and the food is the main attraction.

**"They worry for their kids' futures... so now we are seeing all the old faces back again"**

Trays of baklava dripping with syrup, flaky handfuls of spanakopita and tiropita and, platters of lamb with warm fresh breads and crisp Greek salads.

Almost 45,000 locals flock to the event each year and Lilliane sees no sign of the event slowing down: "Greek and non-Greek people come to the Glenti; they are all our brothers, sisters, and cousins and we raise a lot of money for local charities too."

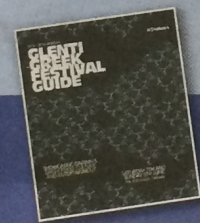
Australia's largest circulation Greek newspaper *Neos Kosmos*, reported on the early Greek cafe scene in Darwin and the origins of those first migrants.

The first Greek to arrive in Darwin, a crewman on George Goyder's survey vessel, was listed as a cook.

The boat berthed at Bynoe Harbour in 1869 and little did that cook know Greek food would become an integral part of Darwin's culture, helping to



The Greek flag, and clockwise from below, Elena and Lilliane Gomatos; baklava; Melissa Anictomatis at work; traditional Greek foods include fetta and ouzo; Greek sardines; the Continental Coffee Shop in 1950s Darwin



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shape the multicultural identity of the city.

According to the *Neos Kosmos*, Greek families arrived in the Top End from various parts of Greece, and other parts of Australia, early in the 1900s. They followed seasonal work from the cane fields of

Queensland to the fishing boats of Western Australia, and many ended up in Darwin pursuing jobs at Vestey's meat works on Bullocky Point.

The meat works closed after a few years and other work in the construction and mining industries took over.

Greeks started small settlements in Darwin in Greek Town near the port at the esplanade, and many also moved to Salonika by the rail link near the meat works.

The Northern Territory Government's archive service has a whole section dedicated

to Greek Town in the Territory Families collection, including stories and audio from the Greek migrants who established the salt works at Ludmilla. With a hungry community so far from home, the need for a cafe or two quickly became paramount.

Local girl Melissa Anictomatis' grandparents and father were part of this early migration, coming to Darwin from Athens almost 60 years ago with nothing. Melissa recalls her grandparents were an integral part of Darwin's early Greek food scene.

"They ran a small restaurant with no official name that served simple food - the kind of Greek food they made at home - to single men, workers, and the wealthy people too. It was just off the mall in Austen Lane", she says.

This small restaurant was one of many that popped up across town in the early 1900s.

Along with Greek-owned cafes such as Zero in the Tropics, the Star Milk Bar and the Continental, Melissa's grandparents were cooking the food they knew best for whoever was around to eat it.

Greek food started to become an integral part of Darwin's evolving food bowl.

Melissa has noticed the changes in recent years as the community has grown.

"There was always a big Greek presence, but you always knew the families. Nowadays there are so many new people and from many different parts of Greece, the Greek population is definitely much bigger than it used to be."

Darwin's food culture has diversified significantly over the years yet the quality and authenticity of Greek food has remained consistent and the community continues to thrive thanks to that very first immigrant. If only that cook was here to reap the rewards of food that is on a par with many of Greece's finest tavernas.

Sources: Northern Territory archives service, *Neos Kosmos*, Melissa Anictomatis, Lilliane Gomatos, Manolis Papathomas