

# The Greek Taverna Cookbook

Chefs' recipes from  
Kefalonia



Written and Illustrated by **Gill Tomlinson**

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# Chefs' recipes from Kefalonia



by Gill Tomlinson



## **Acknowledgements**

*Special thanks to all the hardworking taverna owners, cooks, chefs and waiters who were so helpful in providing recipes, tips, tasters and hospitality during the research for this book.*

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### **Please Note:**

This book was first published as a wire-bound paperback in 2007. Since then some of the tavernas may have moved or closed, and specific details about the establishments or people mentioned may have changed.

for Dorothy, Bob  
and Norman  
with love and thanks







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Abbreviations used:

tsp = teaspoon

tbsp = tablespoon

kg = kilo

g = grams

ml = millilitres

l = litres

(v) = Vegetarian

(+v) = Vegetarian version given

Conversions:

1 tsp = 5ml

1 tbsp = 15ml

1 kg = 35 ounces

100 g = 3½ ounces

240 ml = 1 cup / 8 fl. ounces

1 litre = 34 fluid ounces

Oven temperatures:

170C = 340F

180C = 355F

190C = 375F

200C = 390F

220C = 430F

250C = 480F





# About this book

The recipes in this book were generously donated by the chefs and proprietors of the tavernas of Kefalonia. Twenty-four tavernas from thirteen different locations were selected, either by local reputation, personal recommendation, instinct, or pure kerb appeal.

Recipes are 'straight from the chef's mouth', as far as possible, although they have been adapted to suit family, rather than bulk catering quantities! All recipes were tested in a home kitchen, where the chefs' quantities were weighed and put into standard recipe format.

The illustrations are an expression of the author's love of the food, atmosphere, colour and light that makes Greece what it is. They are a celebration of the tavernas of Kefalonia; the simple food and ambience they provide; the relaxed surroundings and informal approach to eating that is quintessentially Greek.

For those who have visited Kefalonia, this book provides an evocative reminder of dining al fresco under the blue Ionian sky, sampling local specialities, with the scent of oregano in the air. You may even recognise your favourite taverna, or a dish you enjoyed during your stay. Recipes are featured from tavernas in Argostoli, Lassi, Sami, Fiskardo, Assos, Scala, Katelios, Avithos, Aghia Efimia, Lourdas, Lixouri and Agios Georgios Castle. These recipes will help you recreate the authentic tastes and smells of



Kefalonia in your own kitchen, to remind you of those long, balmy taverna evenings. If you have yet to visit the island, and discover all that Kefalonia has to offer, perhaps you will be persuaded to go soon.

This book is dedicated to everyone who, like me, simply loves Greece. May it bring a little of the colour, flavour and aroma of Greece into your home and evoke fond memories of that sun-drenched land.

*Kali Orexi!*

*Gill Tomlinson*

*Above: Lagoudera taverna, Fiskardo*

*Left: View from Nefelis Garden Restaurant, towards Nirides Taverna, Assos harbour*





CORFU

MAINLAND  
GREECE

PAXOS

LEFKAS

ITHAKA

KEFALONIA

ZAKYNTHOS

# Kefalonia - an introduction

Kefalonia is a green and mountainous island, with beautiful beaches of both sand and shingle and exceptionally clear turquoise water. The largest of the seven Ionian islands, and the sixth largest island in Greece, it lies off the coast of the Peloponnese, between Zakynthos to the south and Lefkas to the north. The scenery is magnificent, with dramatic limestone cliffs fringed by cypress, olive and fir trees. Mount Ainos, the highest point on the island at 1,630 metres, is surrounded by a large national park, complete with wild horses and spectacular views. Kefalonia is an excellent island for walkers; visit at the beginning of May, and you will be rewarded with carpets of poppies and wild flowers everywhere. The economy of the island is dependent on agriculture, specifically the cultivation of olives and grape vines, (and to a lesser degree, citrus crops, fruit and vegetables), fishing, shipping and tourism.



Resorts are spread out around the island, with Lassi, one of the most developed, being within walking distance of the capital. Unlike some of the smaller Greek islands, Kefalonia never seems overcrowded, although some of the resorts can get busy in high season. Sightseeing opportunities include a network of underground lakes and caves, Venetian castles, hidden monasteries, Roman and Mycenaean remains, plus strings of secluded mountain villages. Organised coach trips operate from all the resorts, whilst a hire car gives the freedom to explore at your own pace and visit more remote destinations. Do not discount the local bus service if you're based in or around Argostoli. Timetables are available from the bus station printed in English. Out of season the service is slightly limited to some areas, but after mid-May, an impressive schedule kicks in. The first buses out of Argostoli in the morning are patronised mostly by elderly locals returning to the villages with purchases from the capital. Motorbikes and mopeds are another transport

possibility for exploring the island. However, due to the mountainous nature of the terrain and uneven or slippery road surfaces, this method is perhaps best left to experienced bike riders. If you fancy some island hopping, Homer's island of Ithaca lies only 3-4 kilometres off the east coast of Kefalonia. Zakynthos and Lefkas are both a short ferry ride away. The tiny island of Meganissi can be visited on an excellent one-day boat trip, which includes a stop for swimming at Skorpios, the private island owned by the Onassis family.



## THE CAPITAL

Argostoli, the capital of the island since 1757, is home to one third of the population of the island. It is a thriving modern town, of around 12,500 inhabitants, scenically situated on a bay within a bay. The Drapano bridge, originally built by the British in 1813, links Argostoli to the far side of the Koutavros lagoon. The town has a good pedestrianised shopping area and some great tavernas favoured by the locals. There's a fruit and vegetable market on the harbour front, as



well as some fine bakeries, cafés and *kafenía*. This is a good place to sit and observe the activities of the local ferry to Lixouri, and the bigger ones to the Greek mainland.

The hub of the town's social activity takes place around the cafés and restaurants of Valianou Square in the town centre, where the evening *volta* (promenade) takes place. There's quite a buzz around here in summer, particularly during August when the Greeks and Italians are on holiday. For a glimpse of 'old Kefalonia', visit the folklore museum which has a good display of traditional costumes, handicrafts and old photographs. The Bell Tower café in Lithostroto street also has a collection of old photographs plus a panoramic view over Argostoli.



## HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

The Italians, British, Russians, Turks and French have all occupied Kefalonia over the years and it has had a turbulent and often bloody history. With a strong maritime tradition, Kefalonia was known for its fleets of merchant ships trading around the Mediterranean. It was perhaps the Italians, particularly the Venetians, who made the most impact on the cuisine of Kefalonia and the other Ionian islands. They introduced, amongst other things, tomatoes, string beans, squash and peppers during their occupation of the island. Raisins were a particularly important and lucrative export crop for the Venetians and were often referred to as 'black gold'.



The planting of olive trees was encouraged and Kefalonia, like Corfu, has a legacy of hundreds of cypress trees, giving parts of the island an almost Tuscan appearance. Mount Ainos is home to the Kefalonia fir, a wood prized since Minoan times. Centuries of lumber trade and forest fires have depleted the forests, which are now protected by the National Park. In 1823 Lord Byron spent four months in a house in the village of Metaxata, shortly before his death in Missolonghi on the Peloponnese. The house was destroyed in the 1953 earthquake and all that remains is a commemorative plaque with Byron's words, "If I am a poet - I owe it to the air of Greece".



## CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN

Kefalonia was famously the setting for Louis de Bernières' novel *"Captain Corelli's Mandolin"* and the subsequent film starring Nicholas Cage and Penelope Cruz. (The book, by the way, is recommended reading for anyone contemplating visiting the island for the first time.) In 1953, there was a devastating earthquake on Kefalonia which measured 7.3 on the Richter Scale. This destroyed Argostoli and most of the villages on the island. So, it was decided to recreate 'old Argostoli' with all its splendid Venetian architecture, as a film set.

Prior to the earthquake, there were 353 villages on Kefalonia, whereas now there are only 200. The set was built during the summer of 2000 at Sami, a spacious modern harbour town, on the east coast of the island. Antisamos beach, just round the headland from Sami, featured in the film, as did beautiful Myrtos beach on the west coast. Tavernas in Sami and nearby Aghia Efimia, regularly played host to the stars and cast during the weeks of filming on the island.





Greeks love their vegetables and Kefalonians are no exception. The quality and range of colourful vegetables in Argostoli market is inspirational. Vivid green courgettes with blowsy yellow flowers line up with shiny baby aubergines; bright red juicy tomatoes and piles of leafy wild greens. Robust cucumbers; giant green beans; strings of pungent garlic and aromatic mountain herbs are proudly displayed beside litres of the deepest green virgin olive oil.

# vegetables

λαχανικά (lahanika)

Most tavernas make good use of this supply and serve a respectable selection of vegetable-based starters, salads and mains. Order a plate of *horta* (boiled wild greens), served with a drizzle of olive oil and a wedge of lemon. Sample *briam* (local vegetables, slow-cooked with olive oil, herbs and tomato). Or try some *fasolakia prasina* (green beans cooked with onions, tomatoes and olive oil).

*Ladera* is a style of oven-cooking seasonal vegetables in oil, which is used in many tavernas as it lends itself beautifully to bulk catering. These dishes were originally intended as main courses to be served on Greek Orthodox feast days. In fact, Greek vegetable dishes really come into their own during Lent, when meat is traditionally eschewed for forty days.

*Dolmades* (stuffed vine leaves), can appear as a main course, cloaked in delicious *avgolemono* sauce. They are often home-made. *Dolmadakia*

are smaller versions, which are served as starters, without the *avgolemono*. Other popular candidates for stuffing (*yemistes*) are tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, and cabbage leaves.

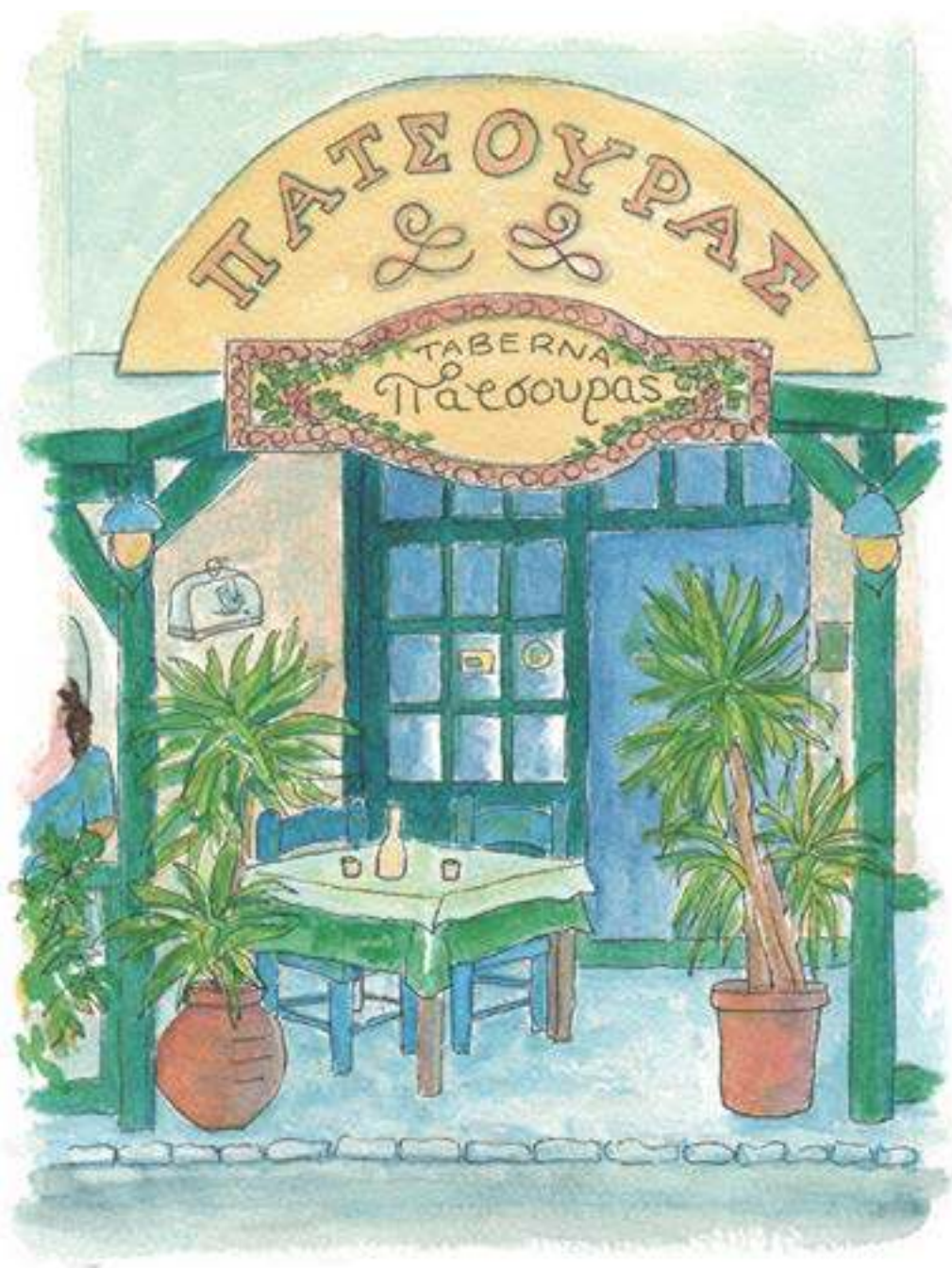
As well as the ubiquitous *horiatiki salata* (Greek salad), resort tavernas may offer a creative range of salads using seasonal produce. Rocket, for instance, is a popular salad ingredient on Kefalonia. Menus in more traditional establishments may be confined to a simple fresh tomato or cucumber salad that needs little more than a drizzle of oil and some sea salt. Or old favourites like shredded lettuce with onion (*marouli salata*); white cabbage salad (*lahano salata*) and cold, boiled beetroot (*pandzari*).

Although sometimes it seems that tavernas serve chips with everything, keep an eye out for yummy *patates sto fourno*, potatoes cooked in the oven, which are served as an accompaniment to meat or fish dishes, or try the recipe on page 34.









### **Patsouras Taverna**

*Hard-working chef and proprietor Chrysanthos produces a wide variety of home-cooked food each day which is displayed in a heated cabinet in the kitchen. The waiter will tell you the daily specials or you can visit the kitchen to see for yourself. Popular with locals and visiting Greeks, Patsouras is a nice old-style taverna serving cheap and very cheerful food.*

# Melitzanes imam

~ Baked aubergines (v)



A nice, juicy, baked aubergine dish. Don't try to skimp on the olive oil – it will take up to six tablespoons to fry the aubergine and another three to fry the onion and garlic. Fresh tomatoes really are best for this dish. Just add one or two tablespoons of tomato puree to enrich the colour, if they are a bit pale. You could substitute a large tin of tomatoes but having tried both, I prefer to use fresh tomatoes as recommended by Mr. Patsouras.



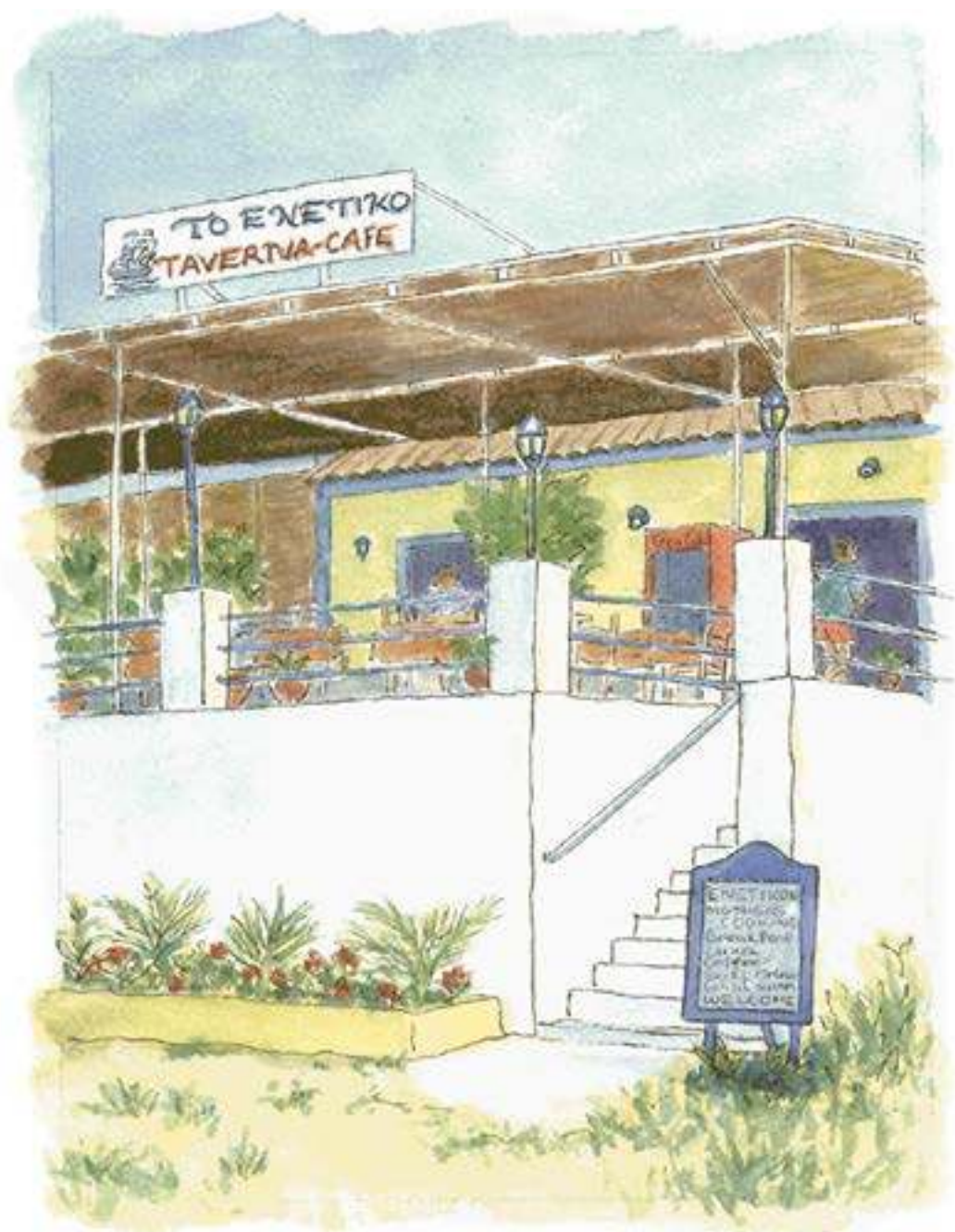
1. Slice the aubergine, sprinkle with salt and drizzle with a little vinegar. Leave to rest in a colander for ½ hour.
2. Meanwhile finely dice the onion and fry in a little oil with the garlic until soft but not brown.
3. Chop the tomatoes in a food processor and add to the onions with a little salt, and a drizzle of oil. Simmer on a low heat for 30 minutes.
4. Rinse and drain the aubergines and dry them on kitchen paper. Shallow fry them in batches in hot olive oil until lightly browned on both sides.
5. Put the cooked aubergine slices in an ovenproof dish and pour the tomato sauce over the top.
6. Bake, uncovered, in a hot oven 200C/Gas 6 for about 45 minutes until the sauce has reduced and the aubergines are nice and soft when you test them with a fork. Serve with fresh bread to mop up the delicious sauce.

**Serves 3-4 - takes 1½ hours**

1 large aubergine  
(or two small ones)  
Sea salt  
Vinegar  
1 large onion  
Olive oil  
6 cloves garlic, chopped  
560g fresh tomatoes  
(around 10)  
1-2 tsp tomato puree  
(optional)



*Many thanks to Chrysanthos of Patsouras Taverna in Argostoli*



### Enetiko Taverna

Kiria Nitsa [now deceased] and her family are known for their traditional Greek “mother’s cooking” made with fresh ingredients at their beach-side taverna in Avithos. The airy taverna looks out over the golden sandy beach and clear waters of Avithos bay, six kilometres south of Argostoli. This is the perfect place for a long, leisurely lunch in the shade, a cooling beer or glass of local wine, and a bit of meditative horizon-gazing.



# Fasolakia prasina

~ Green beans in tomato sauce (v)



A taverna-menu staple, this dish goes really well with lots of the meat or fish dishes in this book, and is a useful vegetable dish for a Greek dinner party. For a vegetarian meal serve it with Greek roast potatoes, a slice of *feta* and a simple salad. Add a chunk of fresh bread to mop up the sauce.

1. Wash and trim the beans. Leave them whole but cut any large ones down to size.
2. Into a large pan put the olive oil, onion and garlic and soften for a moment or two.
3. Chop the tomatoes and parsley in a food processor. Add to the pan with sugar, salt and pepper and cook for 5-10 minutes.
4. Add the beans plus a very little water and cook for 30-40 minutes on a low heat, with a lid on the pan. Check from time to time to ensure there is enough liquid in the pan. Stir and add a drizzle of water if necessary, taking care not to make the sauce too runny. Adjust seasoning and serve.



## Serves 4-6 - takes 1 hour

500g green beans  
75ml olive oil  
1 onion, very finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
2 large tomatoes  
2-3 stalks parsley  
¼ tsp sugar  
Salt and pepper



*Recipe courtesy of the late Kiria Nitsa of Enetiko Taverna on Avithos Beach*

# Inspired By Greece

Even during her time as a student at Chelsea, Gill's art has always been inextricably linked with her love of Greece. Her range of original art, giclée paper and canvas prints, cards, calendars and textile products are all offered under the banner "*Inspired By Greece*" – which tells it exactly as it is. Every watercolour sketch, collage or mixed-media painting that Gill creates is infused with the colour, the warmth and the spirit of Greece.

While Gill paints, creates hand-made gifts, teaches and sells her work from "*The Art Studio*" in the heart of the rural village of Charakopio, her husband Mick is working from their home office 200 metres away. Anything and everything related to graphics is his domain: the scanning of the artwork and preparing it for print, the layout for greeting cards, calendars, this cookbook etc, as well as designing and maintaining the website. Mick's responsible for ensuring quality and colour-matching accuracy throughout the enlarging and reproduction process.

To see the full range of what's currently available, do take a look at the website (linked below). And if you'd like to be updated with news from *The Art Studio* as well as to receive a free printable download – you can sign up for Gill's newsletter at the bottom of each webpage.

**[www.inspiredbygreece.com](http://www.inspiredbygreece.com)**



**'A mouthwatering selection of recipes with delightful illustrations which truly capture the flavour of Greece'**

**R**eal Greek recipes, straight from the taverna kitchens of the island of Kefalonia. Recreate the flavours of Greece in your own home with forty traditional family recipes. Twenty four chefs share their culinary secrets for creating familiar Greek dishes as well as Kefalonian specialities.

### **'Taverna chefs share their secrets'**

More than just a cookbook, this is an artistic celebration of Greek taverna life. It is packed full of local information and insights into Greek culture. Classic taverna recipes have been carefully selected by Gill Tomlinson and personally tested for the home kitchen. Cook, artist and life-long Grecofile, her evocative watercolour sketches capture the colour, light and atmosphere of 'Captain Corelli's Island'.

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#### **Also**

- More than 350 full-colour illustrations
- Delightful and fresh, as well as highly informative
- Unique souvenir of 'Captain Corelli's Island'

*"If you love Greece,  
you will love this book!"*



Gill Tomlinson's passion for Greece started when she lived and worked there in the late 1970's.

Having worked in both Greece and the UK as a professional cook and cookery teacher, Gill has an abiding respect for all the hard-working taverna chefs of Greece.

This personal sampling of the tavernas of Kefalonia, brings together her joy of cooking, a love of Greek food and delight in artistic expression and colour.



~~UK £15.99~~

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