

*How can you live longer? Does it involve diet? Physical activity? Does it depend upon personality? Is it genes?*

*One team of researchers visited five places around the world where people live the longest to distill their secrets of healthy longevity. Voyage to the Greek island of Ikaria, where most inhabitants live well into old age, enjoy a life free of disease and have minds that remain lucid until the end. Read about four other locales where people lead amazingly long lives, including one city right here in America!*

# Places Where Death Takes Its Time





When Italian dictator Benito Mussolini insisted in October 1940 that his army be permitted to occupy strategic points around Greece—giving the country only three hours to ponder his ultimatum—the Greeks responded with a resounding, “No!” In the ensuing battle the Greek army overcame overwhelming odds to drive back the Italians and even occupy a large swathe of territory from Italian-occupied Albania.

This forced Italy’s ally Germany to intervene in April 1941. The Greeks were no match for the Germans and even help from the British could not prevent the German army from completely occupying the country. Many Greek soldiers fled as their army collapsed. Among them was a young veteran named Stamatis Moraitis, who suffered a bullet wound to his hand. He escaped to neighboring Turkey and then convinced the captain of the *Queen Elizabeth II* (the ship had been requisitioned by the British government as a troop carrier) to take him aboard and across the Atlantic.

Moraitis arrived in America in 1943 hoping to obtain medical treatment for his hand. He settled in Port Jefferson on New York’s Long Island where there was a community of Greek immigrants from his home island of Ikaria. Later, Moraitis moved to Boynton Beach, Florida. He lived comfortably with his Greek-American wife and children, and assumed that he would remain in America till he died.

All that changed suddenly one day in 1976. Moraitis began to suffer from pulmonary difficulties and was incapable of continuing at work. Soon, even climbing the staircase posed tremendous difficulty. An x-ray of his lungs revealed the presence of a cancer. The diagnosis was confirmed by nine independent doctors and their prognosis gave him just nine months to live.

Moraitis was in his mid-60s and this dramatic turn of events shook him up badly. For a while he considered undergoing aggressive therapy in a local hospital. After



Coast of Ikaria.



One corner of the Greek island paradise.



Ikaria in the evening.

considering the matter carefully, however, he decided to return to Ikaria to live out his days. At least there he would be buried in his family’s plot, near his parents and grandparents.

Moraitis bought a ticket and flew back to Ikaria. There he moved in with his elderly

parents in a small hut on a two-acre vineyard at the island’s northern tip. For a while, Moraitis remained bedridden while his mother and his wife saw to his needs.

Eventually, Moraitis’ childhood friends learned that he had returned and began visiting him regularly. They spent time chatting about old times, and naturally they offered him some of their fine homemade wine. The visits did much to lift Moraitis’ spirits.

Totally unexpectedly, Moraitis began to feel better. One day, he decided to plant vegetables in the garden outside. Not that he had any illusions that he would live to enjoy its fruits. He simply wanted to work outside under the bright Mediterranean sun.

Time passed and Moraitis lived to enjoy the vegetables he had planted. He even felt strong enough to begin helping tend the family vineyard. Moraitis settled into the daily routine of life on the island: eight hours of sleep, working in the fields through morning hours and then preparing a healthy lunch. Moraitis also took a daily siesta and the evenings were passed in the pleasant company of family and friends.

Moraitis’ health improved. He added some rooms to his parents’ modest home so his children would have a place to stay when they came to visit. He improved the vineyard until he had coaxed it into producing 400 gallons of top-quality wine per year. Nearly 40 years later, Moraitis is 102 and still going strong. There is no trace of the cancer the doctors in America had seen in his lungs, despite the fact that he never took any drug, radiation or chemotherapy to counter it.

All Moraitis did was return to Ikaria.

## Why Are You Staring? You’ve Never Seen a Centenarian Before?!

Few of us meet people over 100 years old. When we do, it is memorable. However, on Ikaria people who have celebrated their

100<sup>th</sup> birthday do not attract much attention. Most of the residents reach their nineties and beyond.

In fact, Ikaria is home to the largest percentage of nonagenarians (a person whose age is in the nineties) of any locale anywhere in the world. No less than one-third of the island’s population achieves that age—two-and-a-half times the rate in the United States. (Regarding men in particular the rate is four times that of the US.)

Not only do Ikarians live long, but they live healthily as well. Their risk of developing cancer is 20% lower than in the US. Few of the Greek islanders suffer from



102-year-old Stamatis Moraitis working on his field – some three decades after he was supposed to have died.



In Ikaria, 90-year-olds remain active and their minds are still sharp.