

# Sips and sounds of a Greek taverna



**Rick Steves**

Whenever I'm in Greece, I don't let a sun go down without enjoying a nice glass of ouzo. It's funny because I don't even like the taste of that licorice-flavored firewater when I'm back home in the United States. But you can't experience Greek culture without really tasting it — from olives at breakfast to ouzo after dark.

You don't drink ouzo straight; instead, you add ice or water, which turns the ouzo from clear to milky white. When my waiter brings my glass, I give him a melodramatic little show — artfully trickling a few drops of water into my ouzo, magically giving it a milky swirl. It's a performance in a glass and suddenly, to him, I'm not just another tourist. I'm a cultural chameleon, mastering a little slice of the Greek life — indicating I'm ready and rarin' for more.

When Greeks really want to show hospitality, the drinking shifts from ouzo to its wilder cousin, tsipouro. Similar to Italian grappa, this brandy-like liquor is about 40% alcohol and makes ouzo seem like kid stuff. It's the drink of boisterous toasts, tall tales and meals that drag late into the night. Judging from my fuzzy photos, the last time I had it ... well, let's just say, it was a great example of going extremely local.

In Greece there's no better spot to "go Greek" than at the local taverna. It doesn't matter if I'm snuggled into the car-free island of Hydra, perched above an untrampled beach on the Mani Peninsula or enjoying a tiny joint hiding in the shadow of Athens' Acropolis. When evening comes,



Greek tavernas are often humble at first glance, but after a few laughs and drinks, you realize how rich they are in heritage, character and charm. **RICK STEVES**

taverna conviviality is what I'm after.

With their basic decor, rickety stools and rustic tables, Greek tavernas are humble at first glance. But after a few laughs and a few drinks, you realize how rich they are in heritage, character and charm. Backgammon dice chatter, as do the wrinkled folks tossing them. Worry beads click and clack as they're threaded between fingers. Hand-rolled cigarettes hang tenuously from lips, and stray cats wait patiently to take your seat — and your dinner — if you dare abandon either.

I like to grab a table in the middle of this action and order my ouzo and a plate of mezedes— with a

smattering of dips, olives and feta-stuffed peppers — which is fun to nibble on while I debate which fresh seafood dish sounds right tonight. (At some seaside tavernas, my options are hanging right in front of me, ready to be thrown on the grill.)

Often, music becomes a part of the evening. Greeks love to dance. Popular dances include the graceful kalamatianos circle dance and the syrtaki, done with arms outstretched or thrown across one another's shoulders. While these are popular for special events like weddings and baptisms, I've found people don't need much of an excuse to break out in dance ... especially at a

taverna with live music. (The ouzo helps.)

Music is a part of everyday life in Greece. The traditional instrument here is a bouzouki. Wandering through any town on a weekend summer evening, I like to follow the happy sound of musicians sitting around an outdoor table playing traditional folk tunes on this long-necked mandolin. As night descends, the crowd is ready to go bouzouki-crazy, and the ouzo-fueled magic of the Greek taverna kicks into high gear. Opa!

Going local by drinking local with the locals isn't just a Greek thing. Wherever you are in Europe, drinks are a fun and easy

way to become a temporary European. When I'm in Tuscany, I drink a full-bodied red wine with dinner — but when I'm in the Cinque Terre, I order a glass of the dry, local white. When you aren't sure what to order, look around, point, and say: "I'll have what she's having." With that approach, rather than just another old-fashioned Old Fashioned, you'll be swirling sangria in Andalucía, pouring sparkling water into pastis in the south of France, and sipping schnapps while perched high in the Alps.

Even if you don't like the taste of the local beverage, order it to go with the cultural flow. I may far prefer a cold pilsner, but if

I'm at a ye olde alehouse in England, you bet I'm asking for a room-temperature cask ale. Do I wish it was colder and more carbonated? Not in England.

And, stepping into a bar anywhere you travel, embrace that wonderful Irish notion that "strangers are just friends who've yet to meet," and chat up the patrons. With the local drink in hand, you'll feel — and be — part of the scene. Cheers!

*Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.*

## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Moriarty: Oregon location magical

By **Jae-Ha Kim**

Tribune Content Agency

Playing a ghost has worked out well for actor and comic Richie Moriarty, who portrays Pete Martino on the CBS series "Ghosts." He spends half the year filming in Quebec and half at home in New Jersey.

"We film mostly in studio in Montreal on our beautiful set, but it's really fun to be able to film on location occasionally," he said. "We (shoot) the exteriors of Woodstone (mansion) in Montebello, Quebec, on a beautiful property that we all love. Rose McIver and I filmed for an entire day this season at Morgan Arboretum in western Montreal, which was a really nice change of scenery. Last season, I got to film a scene with Ben Feldman at an amazing old-school diner in Montreal called Paul Patates. Delicious poutine, great burgers!"

This interview with Moriarty has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: Would Pete make a good travel partner?**

**A:** I would love to go on a trip with Pete. He would plan the entire itinerary, and I could just sit back, relax and enjoy his dad jokes while I sucked down a piña colada. I'm going to politely request my own hotel room though. I'm sure I'll need a break from Pete by the end of each day.

**Q: Do you believe that a location can become a character of the show?**

**A:** The house in Montebello where we film all of the exteriors of the



"Ghosts" actor Richie Moriarty said filming in Montreal is brutally cold, but a lot of fun. **NICK RASMUSSEN**

mansion definitely feels like its own character on the show. It's the site of the deaths of all of the ghosts, so it feels so deeply personal to each character and their backstory. And now that we're 80-plus episodes into the show, we've gotten to explore and showcase so many parts of that amazing property.

**Q: If you could pick a location to film a project, where would it be?**

**A:** I would love an excuse to film anything in New Zealand. Rose McIver speaks so highly of where she grew up, and I've always wanted to explore that part of the world.

**Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?**

**A:** I always try to escape somewhere warm with my wife and kids after our season wraps in February. Montreal winters can be brutal, and I'm always desperate for sunshine by the end of our season. This year we're heading to Playa Mujeres in Mexico.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** I love Cape Cod. I have a ton of family there and have been going there since I was a little kid, so it really feels like home. My Aunt Nance has always called the feeling of calm and relaxation when you arrive on the Cape as being "Caped." That has always

resonated with me. I just sleep better on the Cape and life feels a little lighter when I'm there.

**Q: How do you separate work from vacation trips?**

**A:** We joke as actors that as soon as you book a vacation, you've all but guaranteed that you'll book a role that will force you to cancel that vacation. I dealt with so many situations like that as a working actor in New York in my 30s, when I didn't have the luxury to turn down a job. One of the huge benefits of being a series regular on a show like "Ghosts" is that for the five months when we're not filming, I don't need to work. So when I'm on vacation during our off-season, I can totally relax and be in vacation mode without having to be distracted by work.

**Q: What's a place people should know about?**

**A:** Cape Kiwanda in Pacific City, Oregon. Amazing dunes, incredible beach. Magical place.

**Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?**

**A:** To use the public transit system wherever you go. I always find that it's a great way to get to know a city and to get the best sense of what it would be like to actually live there.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Aer Lingus withholds full refund from canceled flight

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

My wife and I were scheduled to fly from Paris to Philadelphia.

Aer Lingus canceled the flight due to "operational issues" and told me to request a refund.

I paid \$5,246 for the tickets, but the airline only refunded \$4,502.

I've emailed repeatedly about the missing \$744 and keep getting new case numbers with promises to "contact me soon."

It's been weeks without a resolution. What can I do?

— James Jones, Naples, Florida

**A:** When an airline cancels a flight for reasons within its control, passengers are entitled to a full refund under European consumer regulations. But Aer Lingus left you in a financial holding pattern.

EU Regulation 261/2004, the European consumer protection law, requires an airline to fully refund you within seven days if you paid by credit card. Aer Lingus' partial refund and radio silence violate both its contractual obligations and EU consumer protections.

Here's what should have happened: After canceling your flight, Aer Lingus needed to promptly refund the full \$5,246 without you having to ask. Instead, it shortchanged you by \$744 and ignored your follow-ups — a classic airline run-around.

Airlines often bank on travelers giving up, but EU rules don't let them off the hook. When you pay with a credit card, a charge-back for the missing amount could pressure Aer Lingus to act (a step worth considering if this happens

again).

I can't believe it would do this to you. The tickets you purchased were pricey business-class fares. Aer Lingus should have bent over backward to help you, considering your value as a customer.

You did the right thing by documenting every interaction. Paper trails are critical. Still, when companies stonewall, escalating to executives is key. I've published contact details for Aer Lingus' leadership team on my consumer advocacy site, [Elliott.org](http://Elliott.org). A polite but firm email to these decision-makers often breaks the logjam. It looks like you tried the contacts, but they ignored you.

I've reviewed the correspondence between you and Aer Lingus, which I frankly find frustrating. The airline offered you a full refund, which you accepted, and then it failed to follow through. Instead of a coherent answer to your repeated question, it just kept sending you new case numbers. If anything,

your case is a reminder to always check your airline refund. Never assume that just because the airline offered you a refund that you will receive all of it — or any of it. Check your credit card statement to make sure that you received everything.

So, why did Aer Lingus short you by \$744? Based on the emails it sent you, it looks like it might have broken out taxes into a separate charge. Aer Lingus might have also recalculated your refund based on currency fluctuations. It's difficult to know for certain. I asked Aer Lingus about your refund, but it would not tell me why it withheld the \$744.

What it would do is fix this for you. After I reached out to Aer Lingus on your behalf, it refunded the \$744 that it owed you.

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