



#DestinationHighlightAgiosNikolaos

Klidonas: The Night of Fire and Destiny in Agios Nikolaos



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The Tradition of Klidonas in Crete

Every year in late June, communities across Crete celebrate **Klidonas**, one of **the island's most fascinating summer traditions**.

The celebration takes place **on the evening of June 23rd, the eve of St. John's Day**, and continues into the following day, when **the birth of St. John the Baptist is celebrated on June 24th**.

The custom has **very deep roots in Greek tradition**. References to similar practices appear even **in the time of Homer**, when symbolic sounds and signs **were interpreted as messages about the future**.

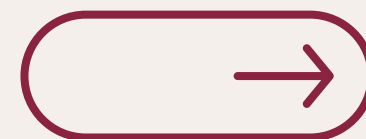
During the Byzantine period, the tradition became closely associated with celebrations involving fire and purification rituals that marked **the changing of the seasons**. That's why now tradition is closely connected with **the period of the summer solstice**, when the days are longest. Over time, ancient seasonal rituals linked to fertility, renewal, and the changing of the seasons gradually merged with Christian celebrations honoring St. John.

The name **Klidonas** comes from the ancient Greek word **klidon**, meaning **an omen or prophetic sign**, reflecting the tradition's connection with fortune, destiny, and the revealing of what is yet to come.

For visitors exploring Crete in early summer, these celebrations offer a rare opportunity to witness local traditions where folklore, storytelling, and community life come together.



Source: mixanitouxronou



23rd June: The “Silent Water”

The tradition begins on the evening of June 23rd with the collection of what is known as “**silent water**”.

A **young unmarried girl** walks to a nearby spring, fountain, or well to collect water **without speaking a single word along the way**. The silence is considered essential, as it is believed to preserve the symbolic power of the ritual.

In traditional folklore, silence represents focus, purity of intention, and respect for the unseen forces believed to influence fate. Villagers would sometimes even try to make the girl speak on her way back. If she did, the water had to be thrown away and collected again so that it remained truly “silent.”

Once she arrives home, the water is placed in a jar with a narrow opening. **This jar becomes the center of the Klidonas ritual as the next stage of the tradition begins.**





The “Rizikaria”

Once the silent water has been brought back, each girl participating in the tradition places a small personal object into the jar.

These objects may include **a ring, earring, button, coin, or another small item that represents the person who placed it inside.**

In Cretan tradition these objects are known as “rizikaria,” a word derived from **riziko, meaning fate or destiny.** Each object symbolically represents the life path and future of the person who owns it.

Once all the objects have been placed inside, the jar is carefully covered, often with a red cloth, and left outside overnight, usually in a courtyard or terrace under the stars.

At this point, the ritual is said to **“close” the Klidonas,** and the village waits for its opening the next day.





Opening the Klidonas



On the following day, **June 24th**, the community gathers again to **“open” the Klidonas**.

During the gathering, one woman or young girl removes the objects from the jar one by one. As each object is drawn from the water, a **mantinada** – a traditional Cretan rhyming verse – is recited.

These playful verses symbolically reveal the fate, future relationships, or romantic prospects of the person whose object has been drawn.

This moment is often filled with laughter, teasing, and excitement, giving the tradition a strong poetic and social character deeply connected with the rich oral traditions of Crete.

Cretan Mantinada

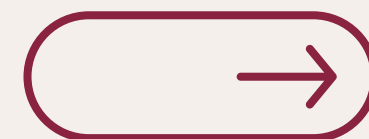
Greek:

*Ανοίγω τον Κλήδονα με τ' άστρα
συντροφιά,
κι ας φέρει η μοίρα μου αγάπη και
χαρά.*

English:

*I open the Klidonas with stars
beside my way,
and may my fate bring love and joy
from this bright day.*





Bonfire and the Wreaths of May

Another well-known element of Klidonas is the lighting of bonfires, one of the most visually striking parts of the celebration.

In many villages and neighborhoods, large fires are lit in streets or village squares as the sun sets. Around these fires, people gather to celebrate, sing, and enjoy the festive atmosphere.

One important ritual is the **burning of the flower wreaths from Protomagia (“the 1st of May” Day)**, which have decorated homes since the first day of May. Throwing the wreaths into the fire symbolically closes the cycle of spring and welcomes the arrival of summer.

Young people and children often jump over the flames, a playful act believed to bring **good luck, purification, and protection from misfortune**.

For visitors witnessing the celebration, the sight of people gathering around the fire, sharing music and laughter, creates a memorable experience into the island’s living traditions.



Summer Traditions in Agios Nikolaos

Traditions like Klidonas are an important part of the cultural life of Crete and continue to be celebrated in villages and communities across the island.

In the region of Agios Nikolaos, summer evenings are filled with local celebrations, cultural events, and gatherings that reflect the island's vibrant traditions and strong sense of community. Music, laughter, and storytelling often bring people together in village squares and neighborhoods, keeping these customs alive from one generation to the next.

For cruise visitors exploring Agios Nikolaos, these traditions offer the opportunity to experience the destination beyond its landscapes and historical landmarks. They reveal a side of the island where folklore, music, poetry, and community celebrations remain deeply connected to everyday life.

Experiencing these traditions allows cruise visitors to connect with the authentic spirit of Crete, **turning a short visit to Agios Nikolaos into a meaningful cultural encounter.**



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