



♣ Folk Dancing

For centuries, infectious Greek songs with their insistent rhythms have lured listeners to dance — to celebrate happy occasions, bond together in wartime, and even express loneliness. Communal dancing appears on ancient Greek vases and in Byzantine frescoes. One dance, the *tsakónikos* from the Peloponnesus, allegedly represents the mythical king Theseus threading his escape through the labyrinth of the minotaur in Crete.





GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

There are hundreds of traditional Greek folk dances. Each region boasts its own favorites and has certain characteristics. Cretan dances are proud and vigorous. The dances of the plains of Thessaly are controlled and composed, and some mountain people dance with wide steps and leaps. Even cold weather can affect dance style when heavy clothing is worn, as evident in northern Epirus. Some dances are named for their locality (*roditikos* from Rhodes) or a profession (*basápiiko* from the word for butcher, *basapis*). Names are also derived from a city, an event, or a special person. Many dances are related to each other, with individual variations.

Greeks and Greek Americans enjoy non-folk dancing also, such as the tango, waltz, disco, rock, and the latest trend. The danger of forgetting the traditional dances always exists, but they continue to survive along with the modern. Greek Americans like to mix contemporary and traditional dancing when they celebrate.

DANCE TIPS

The great fun of most Greek dancing is its communal, inclusive nature. With the exception of a few solo and couples' dances, everyone joins in the serpentine lines that whirl and weave around the floor: the reluctant novice, the two-year-old, the dance expert, the irritable grouch.

Anyone can join an open-circle dance by grabbing someone's hand at the end of the dance line or by breaking into the middle. You are swooshed into the heady whirl, taking lessons on the spot just by imitating the person next to you. People tend to be patient and encouraging with beginners, pleased that you want to learn. You will be criticized more for not trying than for making mistakes.

Leaders of the line, however, are expected to know the basic steps and variations, so the front is not a comfortable position for a novice. A good leader puts on a show. Partially suspended from a handkerchief held by the next person in line, the leader performs variations on the basic steps, sometimes leaping into the air. Others in the line show their approval by shouting, "*Ópa,*" or