

Whose Name
the Kids
Would Take
Was Settled
by a Family
Olympics

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Grace Yoon

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

James Fleming’s wedding toast came with a twist. He wasn’t just raising his glass—he was raising the stakes. “Welcome to the first and last ever Schifferle versus Fleming Family Olympics, where we will be competing for one grand prize,” he announced. “The winning family will determine the name of our future children.”

Laughter rippled around the table. Then came the double takes.

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TO BHMA International edition

The Future
of the Planet
Is on Our Plate

By Fotini Fragkou

What we eat has consequences. Our diets affect our health, the climate, land use and the future of those who make their living from it. A new international study published in the scientific journal *Nature* examines what could happen if the world radically changed the way it produced and consumed food.

According to its findings, a combination of healthier dietary choices, reduced food waste and improved agricultural production could cut carbon dioxide emissions associated with land use by as much as 85% by 2050.

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A wildfire burns in Krya Vrissi, a village on the island of Evia, about 139 kilometers north of Athens, Greece, Friday, Aug. 6, 2021. The coast guard evacuated hundreds of people by sea during the incident amid heat wave conditions.

THODORIS NIKOLAOU/AP PHOTO

TO BHMA International edition

Greece in Flames: A Nation
Burning, A State Unprepared

By Angelos
Gassenschmidt

The past decade has seen tumultuous changes in Greece’s forest landscapes. Attica in particular—the

home of the country’s only true metropolis, Athens, and over one third of the population—has been hit particularly hard.

Since 2019, fires have led to the destruction of over 254,000 acres of forest land. To put that into

perspective, this is an area approximately 17.4 times the size of Manhattan, or over 145,000 football fields. For Attica, this means that 27% of the region’s entire area (not just forest area) has been lost to fires in the past 7 years alone.

Zooming in specifically on forest land rather than total area, nearly 40% of Attica’s forests have been destroyed by wildfires over the last 9 years, according to an analysis by the National Observatory of Athens.

In Western Attica, a

sparsely populated region, the numbers show that 120,000 acres have burned over the last nine years, a figure that will need to be updated once the dust has settled after the end of this summer’s fire season.

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A campsite with a motorhome and small, colorful tents is set up for a summer getaway.

TO BHMA International edition

Why More Greeks Are Choosing
Camping for Summer Vacation

By Konstantinos Dedes

The hammock sinks under the weight of a body, forming a curve at the center of which the setting sun, like an oversized orange dot, signals the arrival of night. At the same time, the season’s most familiar soundtrack, the

song of cicadas, blends with the waves, which renegotiate their boundary with the shore each time they break. It is summer, and summer means carefree days, sunsets and rest. And camping, of course. This is one of many scenes that Greek and international tourists encounter, depending on the location, once they

pass through the gates of one of Greece’s more than 290 organized campgrounds. The choice between “room or tent?” remains a difficult one, but in recent years it appears to have become more flexible, as growing numbers of people seek closer contact with nature and with reality. Economic reality, that is.

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“Is he serious?” the new in-laws whispered to one another.

Peter Fleming, convinced this was just another of his son’s antics, chuckled in disbelief.

“Are you telling me that my grandchildren will have their name determined by an Easter egg hunt?” he asked. “How the hell are you going to explain that to your poor children?”

But James wasn’t just staging an elaborate family game. He and his wife, Mikaela Schifferle, were trying to answer a modern conundrum: Whose name does a family carry?

Taking on the husband’s last name is a centuries-old tradition rooted in

A Fight Over Whose Name the Kids Would Take Was Settled by a Family Olympics

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

When tradition isn’t your cup of tea, choosing a last name sometimes requires high-jinks; ‘I will die for this name’

English common law, which dictated that a wife assume her husband’s surname because her legal identity was now subsumed by her husband’s.

Though the practice isn’t legally required in the U.S., a 2023 study by Pew Research shows nearly 80% of women in opposite-sex marriages take on their

spouse’s last name when they get married.

Couples who choose not to follow tradition won’t easily find a universally accepted alternative. The most

common solution is to hyphenate their last names or keep their own last names.

Sydney Barreto-Stillman knew she wanted to carry on the lineage of the

Dr. Stillmans in her family, and saw no reason why the name on her white coat should disappear beneath the one that came with her white dress.

Her husband kept his last name, while she hyphenated her last name with his. Their children also have the surname Barreto-Stillman.

“I just wanted to keep a little part of me. I wasn’t ready to give that up yet,” she said.

For couples in same-sex marriages, there is no default expectation or tradition.

Cookie Glatzel, who identifies as nonbinary, kept their last name after marrying their wife. But when the couple decided to have children, Glatzel reconsidered.

The Summer That the Monoculture Made a Comeback

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The World Cup, Taylor Swift’s wedding and ‘The Odyssey’ brought us together

By Esther Zuckerman
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The end of monoculture has been widely reported.

Earlier this year, in this newspaper, Ben Fritz wrote that “monoculture”—entertainment that is universally consumed—is dying a rapid death,” citing the fact that “we’re all watching and listening to different things, fed to us by algorithms designed to divide us into uniquely satisfied consumers.”

This summer suggested something else: people still crave the feeling of watching, cheering and talking about the same thing at the same time. It feels like the monoculture is at least trying to hold on for dear life. From

the World Cup and “The Odyssey” to “Spider-Man: Brand New Day,” we’re finally all watching the same things, giddily cheering for goals and legendary heroes, be they super or otherwise. We saw soccer devotees boost local economies and Spidey set box office records. It’s been awesome.

“It does seem like more often than not, this summer we’re having the same conversation in a way that I really think we haven’t since Covid,” said Hunter Harris, a pop culture observer who co-hosts the podcast “Lemme Say This” and writes the Substack newsletter “Hung Up.”

If you want to be cynical you could chalk it up to coincidence. This summer had a perfect storm of events that were expected to have massive appeal: a Christopher

Nolan movie, Taylor Swift’s wedding, a global sporting event. There was no guar-

antee we all would want to participate—some of us, namely me, have never really

had a vested interest in soccer before. But once we were reminded how much fun it is to experience an event in a group again, we couldn’t seem to get enough.

The summer started with New York Knicks’s thrilling run to capture the NBA Championship. The fervor was especially pronounced in New York, where it seemed like every street was turned into a viewing party, but the love for Jalen Brunson and Karl-Anthony Towns spread across the nation. Soon after, the World Cup made household names of players like Spain’s Lamine Yamal and Norway’s Erling Haaland, creating new fans out of people who previously had no idea what an offside call was.

“The World Cup provided a nice baseline for us to remember what feels

so good about consuming things together,” said Amanda Dobbins, who talks about movies and celebrities on two Spotify podcasts, “The Big Picture” and “Jam Session.”

Then, over July 4 weekend, even those who didn’t consider themselves Swifties, had an opinion about Taylor Swift’s Madison Square Garden wedding to Travis Kelce. Part of that was the guest list. No matter what you were into—country music, indie rock, arthouse film, literature, the NFL, finance, or even “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia”—there was someone in attendance to draw you as you peered at blurry photos of SUVs arriving at the venue. As Dobbins put it, the event was recapped on both celebrity gossip site “Deux-Moi and LinkedIn.”



Screens display a message referencing singer Taylor Swift and National Football League (NFL) player Travis Kelce outside Madison Square Garden, the venue for their reported wedding celebrations, in New York, U.S., July 3, 2026.

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They ultimately changed their surname to match their wife's, deciding that sharing one family name mattered more than preserving their own.

"Having the same last name legitimizes our family status it seems," Glatzel said.

The surname debate can bring out the creative side in some.

Jaime and Nathan Van Hart planned a date night to present a pitch deck of last names they'd consider taking on. The couple landed on Van Hart, trading in McPherson and Reynolds for a name that paid homage to their engagement in Amsterdam. In Dutch, it translates to "from the bottom of my heart."

For James Fleming, the answer seemed logical. What's more fair than a natural-selection process that tests their families' endurance, intelligence and strength?

"If my family cannot win a competition, then my last name doesn't deserve to be continued," he said.

The seemingly ridiculous premise became a real motivator once the games started.

Alicia Schifferle, Mikaela's sister, knew she had to give the competition everything she had for her future nieces and nephews. "I didn't fully understand how much you really want it until it's your family," she said. "And then you're like, 'I will die for this name.'"

The first event of the Family Olympics was an Easter egg hunt. James had hidden 136 eggs around their venue in Tussie Mus-sie Vineyard on Australia's



Mornington Peninsula the night before.

Wooden baskets swinging behind them, the Flemings and Schifferles darted between trees, dug through

patches of ivy and peered beneath shrubs.

"Everyone was running around like little headless chickens," Alicia said.

When William Fleming,

James's brother, was voted his family's representative for the 50 meter sprint, the pressure was palpable. "Nerves are high looking down the line," he said. "I

don't think I've run that fast in a long time."

Over five hours, the families competed in 12 events spanning from Jenga to charades. The highlight

was a dance battle to "Party in the U.S.A."

From shoulder shimmies and frat flicks to somersaults and knee slides, the Flemings and Schifferles left it all on the dance floor to prove the prowess of their family name. Mikaela's grandmother and James crowned Mikaela's parents the best dancers. Mikaela, who was supposed to judge the round with James, refused herself because she felt she would be too biased.

In the endurance round, James's mother, Christiane Coutant, was pitted against Alicia, who is half her age.

"I was like there's no way, but then I thought 'Hang on, hang on, hang on,'" Christiane said.

Though Alicia emerged victorious, Christiane held a plank for over three minutes, arms trembling and gritting her teeth. Losing wasn't an option.

As the sun set, the Flemings and Schifferles were tied. It would come down to one final game.

Sweaty, exhausted and streaked in grass stains, the families gathered in the common room for the deciding match. After wheelbarrow races, cornhole and beer pong, it all hung on a game of Rock Paper Scissors between the newlyweds.

James threw scissors.

Mikaela threw rock.

The Schifferles had won. And despite the grueling afternoon, there were no hard feelings.

William even feels inspired to follow in his brother's footsteps when his own big day comes. "It's a very fun, unique way of deciding a name and adding a bit of joy to it."

Movies also had their brush with monoculture. "You didn't love 'The Odyssey' as much as I loved 'The Odyssey,' " a man who works in my Manhattan apartment building challenged me almost out of nowhere when I was walking my dog one day. What followed was a spirited conversation about Nolan's representation of Athena, played by Zendaya. I told him I had already seen Nolan's adaptation of the Homeric epic twice. He promised he was going back.

This enthusiasm was playing out everywhere. The Odyssey crossed \$1 billion at the global box office within its first month, while IMAX extended coveted 70MM screenings into September.

"Spider-Man: Brand New Day" also brought out the masses, with the biggest domestic opening of all time, earning \$360 million.

"What it really comes down to is that people want to be involved in something that's bigger than themselves



Spain fans celebrate as they watch the FIFA World Cup final between Spain and Argentina at the Brooklyn Bridge park party.

that's positive," said Paul Der-garabedian, head of market-place trends at Rentrak, which

analyzes box office data.

Sure, there are still areas where the monoculture is

flailing. It is unclear whether there has been an undeniable "song of the summer,"

despite the chart strength of Ella Langley's "Choosin' Texas" and no scripted tel-

evision show has captured universal attention.

Still, there's palpable sense that people are seeking out these moments. I've loved the nods from people also wearing Knicks gear on their morning coffee runs. It's been galvanizing to hear cheers on the sidewalk and realize that a crowd has been watching a match. I've been heartened by the throngs of people gathered in multiplexes, even if it means the floors are extra sticky from spilled soda. I even treasured that weekend where we all kept refreshing our phones to see if Swift would drop pictures of her Dior gown.

Monoculture doesn't mean we have to agree, but it does mean we have to share. And through that sharing it's been nice to be a little bit closer to my fellow man this summer. Here's hoping that closeness lasts at least through the fall. Maybe "Avengers: Doomsday" and "Dune: Part Three" releasing on the same day will do the trick.

Greece in Flames: A Nation Burning, A State Unprepared

Since 2019, wildfires have destroyed over 254,165 acres of forest in Attica alone. Year after year, Greek leaders promise readiness. Year after year, the forests burn. A look at the numbers, the excuses, and what experts say is actually needed to end the destruction

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Fires that cross the 25,000-acre threshold are classified as megafires, burning indiscriminately and leaving a trail of destruction that spares neither forest nor homes. In August 2021, a fifth of the island of Evia (128,000+ acres) went up in flames.

In July 2023, Rhodes lost 43,243 acres. This year's Porto Germeno fire has left an estimated 35,000 acres scorched.

Many of the fires have destroyed priceless ecosystems that will be nigh on impossible to restore, such as the Dadia Forest in Evros in north-eastern Greece or the Preveli Palm Forest in southern Crete.

The former has been classified as the largest single wildfire in the EU in modern history, scorching nearly 198,000 acres in one fell swoop, compounding the destruction wrought by the 2022 fire and leaving 58-70% of Dadia forest destroyed.

Who is to blame?

The question of who is to blame looms large. Arrests are made for arson, whether negligent or deliberate, in an effort to deliver some form of justice, but that will not restore the natural ecosystem to its former state.

Despite Greece being an arid country prone by nature to wildfires, the Greek political establishment seems completely incapable of addressing the existential threat that megafires pose in any systematic way. With climate change accelerating, this political ineptitude is no longer responsible for only sporadic damage; it is resulting in a cataclysmic whirlwind of devastation. Successive governments have failed to take responsibility. Politicians like Vyron Polydoras blamed the "General Wind" for the catastrophic 2007 wildfires that erased 1/3 of the Parnitha Natura 2000 park.

In more recent years, the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis echoed the same excuse, but paired it with an annual ritual reassurance that, year on year, the country is becoming more robust and ready to confront the seasonal fires.

Needless to say, given the incalculable losses suffered every year, their reassurances provide little com-



A satellite image shows smoke rising from a wildfire near Porto Germeno, Greece taken on August 2, 2026.

fort. Though the average citizen has little idea of what "prepared" is meant to look like, they do get to see what the lack of preparedness leads to each year, and can only shake their heads in frustration and anger.

Of course, natural weather conditions are becoming more volatile and unpredictable, as shown in the OECD's 2024 country case

study on Greece.

However, the same report also noted that, quite apart from lacking a unified fire-prevention strategy, Greece disperses responsibility for wildfire prevention across more than 45 agencies and bodies. This turns the system into yet another inefficient bureaucratic nightmare.

So, the key questions are

these: How can we say the country is at maximum readiness? And who is responsible when things go awry?

And how far can we blame forces beyond our control rather than our own failure to prepare? How long until rigorous mechanisms are put in place to stop these disasters from escalating catastrophically?

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Edition spoke to various experts, who share their know-how on the matter. They all agree that prevention needs to take precedence over fire-fighting, and may help quell some of the feelings of help-



A view of a burned house in Psatha, Greece, August 4, 2026.

lessness we all feel.

Prevention above all else

When we spoke to Dr. Konstantinos Lagouvardos, Director of the National Observatory of Athens, he pointed out that, as rural communities slowly wither away, activities such as grazing, which help reduce dry biomass, are also disappearing. The result: forests accumulate combustible material, which dries out and becomes flammable, even when temperatures are not extreme.

Dr. Lagouvardos also stressed the need for the state to make better use of scientific tools, such as fire danger rating maps, both before and after a fire.

He highlighted an administrative flaw, too: the risk categories used by the Ministry for Climate Crisis and Civil Protection are too broad to guide meaningful interventions. Specifically, he explained that assigning one of the five color categories to a whole administrative unit overseen by the fire brigade lacks the necessary granularity to inform decision-making at the local level.

He argued there are better tools and practices, which allow for a more detailed picture. He was referring to maps used by the FLAME pyrometeorology team, whose focus is firmly on advancing scientific understanding of extreme fire-weather conditions and extreme wildfire behavior in Greece. FLAME operates under the METEO unit of the National Observatory.

"Twenty-five years ago," he noted, "such a high spatial resolution simply did not exist. Now we have the tools. The problem is that some people don't want to look at the detail available at every point on the map."

Other tools include the use of wind and humidity forecasting, which, he told us, are not being used to their full potential.

As he sees it, and his view is shared by many of his colleagues, the authorities and operational bodies need to work with meteorologists and fire-meteorologists to facilitate the effective use of scientific knowledge in the field. It is the only way

to harmonize practice on the ground with the latest research.

A second perspective: operational meteorology

Wanting to get a more granular view of the matter, I also spoke to pyrometeorologist Thodoris Giannaros, a researcher at the Institute for Environmental Research and Sustainable Development (IERSD) and founding member of the FLAME team.

He reiterated many of the points made by Dr. Lagouvardos, including the need for controlled grazing and winter burning to remove excess vegetation. He also emphasized the development of operational meteorology through close cooperation between scientists—such as meteorologists, foresters, geographers, engineers, and many more—and the Fire Service for better risk assessment, early detection of threats, and real-time analysis of fires when they occur.

There can be no talk of preparedness for the fire season if all these areas are not addressed.

He also explained that we generally prefer to talk about “heroes” after the fires have been fought, rather than actually implementing the tools we have available.

The 2026 forestry law

Giannaros went on to speak favorably about the new law that came into force this year. Crucially, as well as establishing a unified protection policy that combines every available tool, it also includes a 10-year forest management plan. Its duration is key—because it extends beyond a single government term, it could have a truly long-term effect. It is a shame, he said, that the law did not have enough time to make an impact before the latest wildfires.

In light of this law, the Directorate for Combating Arson Crimes (DAEE) has been strengthened with enhanced investigative capabilities. From now on, after major incidents, they will be able to document the cause of the fire in a rapid and coordinated manner.

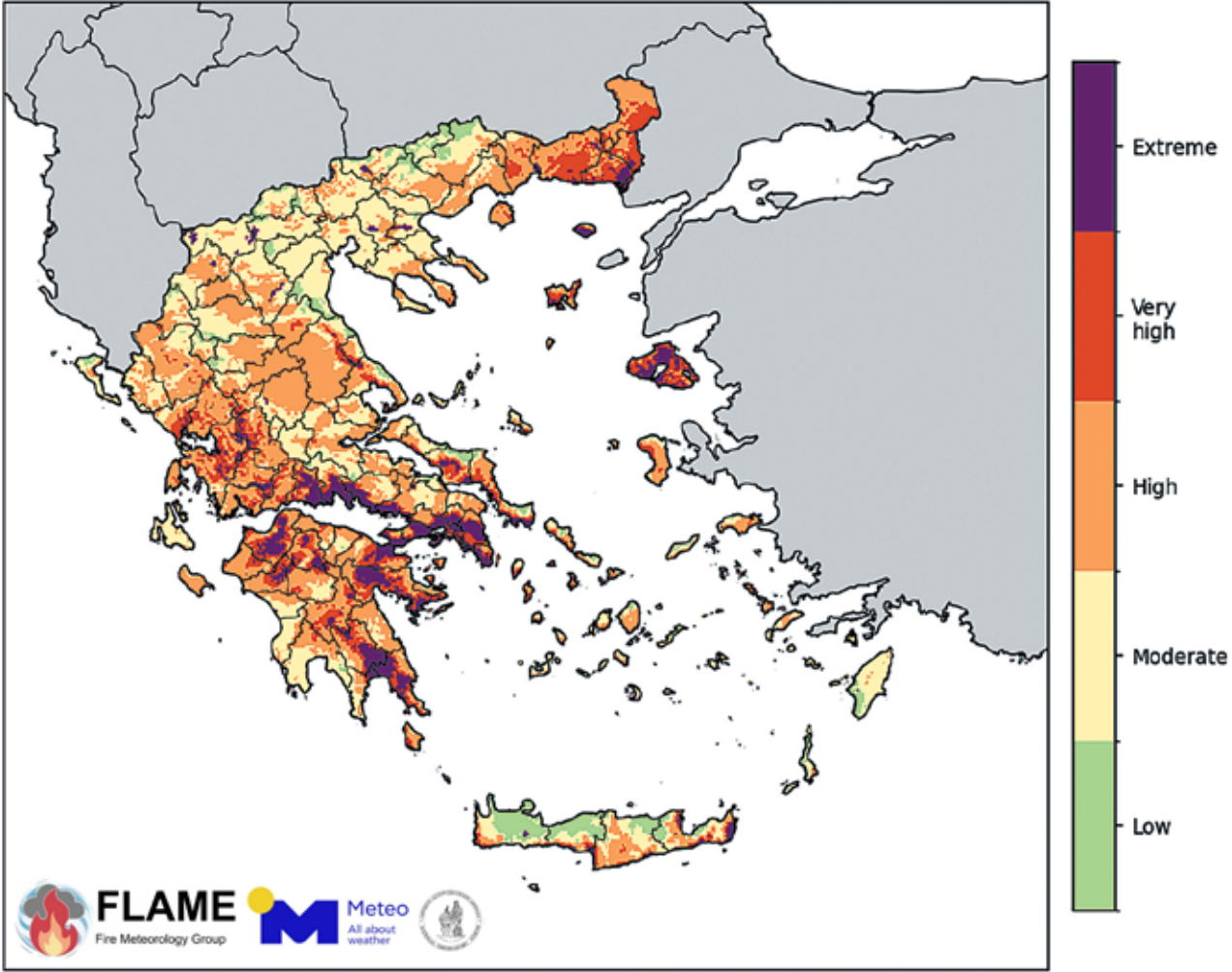
For Dr. Giannaros, it is very important that we have data that shed light on the causes of fires, so we know exactly what percentage are due to negligence, deliberate arson, accidents, and natural causes. This is all rather haphazard at present, but the ultimate goal is to “drown out” conspiracy theories (about wind turbine installations and the like) using documented data.

‘We don’t know the cost of suppression’

He also addressed an important gap—in putting out fires this time, not pre-



HERMES/WRF V2.0: Greece - 2km
 GFS Init.: 12/08/2026 00Z
 Fire Weather Index - Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index System
 Valid: 13/08/2026 12Z



The Government Promises

June 19, 2020

In a speech at the ceremony for the handover of 20 firefighting vehicles donated by the Papastratos company, the PM noted that “this year we are more prepared than ever.”

June 14, 2022

In an interview with ERT1 journalist George Kouvaras he stated “we will be far more prepared this summer compared with last year.”

May 24, 2025

In an interview with Parapolitika, the Minister of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection, Giannis Kefalogiannis, stated that “we are more prepared than any other year, both in terms of prevention and in terms of personnel and available resources.”

July 22, 2026

Mitsotakis said, following his meeting with Portuguese PM Luís Montenegro that “we are at the highest level of preparedness.”

venting them. Namely, the general public has no idea of the actual cost of suppression, measured in firefighter numbers, combat hours, and aerial assets—including the costs of leasing and operating them.

He also believes that using seasonal firefighters is a mistake, highlighting the state’s persistent focus on extinguishing fires instead of preventing them. He argues for a year-round firefighting force that could be put to work on fire-prevention projects during the fall and winter.

The key takeaway

Having gathered input from experts on the current state of fire safety in Greece, we come away with one key takeaway: Greece has all the available tools at its disposal, and knows exactly what must be done—it just lacks the political will and coordination to make the most effective use of them.

And without political will and coordination, wildfires will continue to ravage the country for years to come.



The Future of the Planet is on Our Plate

The lead author on an international food study speaks to *TO VIMA* about how healthier diets, less food waste and more efficient farming could dramatically cut land-use emissions by 2050

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The research was conducted by scientists from the University of London, Cornell University in the United States and 10 other international research teams. Lead author Dr. Matthew Gibson, a researcher at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), explains the study's broader implications to *TO VIMA-Science*.

An international model for healthy eating

The researchers based their study on a report by the EAT-Lancet Commission known as the "Planetary Health Diet." The report was the product of a collaboration between the nonprofit organization EAT and the leading medical journal The Lancet, bringing together dozens of scientists specializing in nutrition, medicine, agriculture, environmental science and economics. The report produced a series of dietary proposals and recommendations. While it does not advocate an entirely vegetarian diet or the complete elimination of animal products, it recommends reducing the consumption of red and processed meat and placing greater emphasis on plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and whole grains. It also

includes smaller amounts of fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products.

As Gibson points out, the proposed dietary model was designed primarily with human health in mind, rather than as a diet conceived from the outset solely to promote sustainability.

The scenario scientists examined

Using this model as their starting point, the researchers employed advanced computer models to simulate possible future developments. They used 10 different global economic models examining how land use and food production interact with consumption, trade, prices and environmental impacts.

The scientists constructed a hypothetical scenario in which three changes occurred simultaneously: people adopted healthier diets based on the EAT-Lancet model, agriculture became more efficient through technology and food waste was cut in half.

The models incorporated historical data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) from 1961 to 2020, along with projections for population growth, economic development, the climate crisis, crop yields,

water and fertilizer use, and greenhouse gas emissions. Researchers then compared this alternative future with a business-as-usual scenario in which current dietary choices and policies remained essentially unchanged.

Less livestock, more crops

According to the scientists' simulations, simultaneously changing diets, reducing food waste and improv-

ing agricultural production could create a global food system that requires less land to meet the world's needs by 2050.

Total agricultural land use could fall by about 6% compared with 2020, largely because less land would be needed for livestock farming and animal feed production. At the same time, the economic value of cattle, sheep and goat production could decline by as much as 70% as consump-

tion of animal products fell. Conversely, a greater share of agricultural land could shift toward plant crops, which would take on a more central role in the global food system.

"We see a significant increase in the economic value of vegetable, fruit, nut and legume production, and a corresponding decline in the value of livestock production," Gibson says. He stresses that such a shift would likely place significant pressure on livestock farmers, particularly in regions where animal production is a cornerstone of the local economy, making support and adaptation policies necessary.

The environmental and human health benefits

The models also showed that greenhouse gas emissions associated with changes in land use could fall by as much as 85% by 2050, largely because there would be less need for deforestation and the expansion of agricultural land.

"Food systems are responsible for around 30% of global greenhouse gas emis-

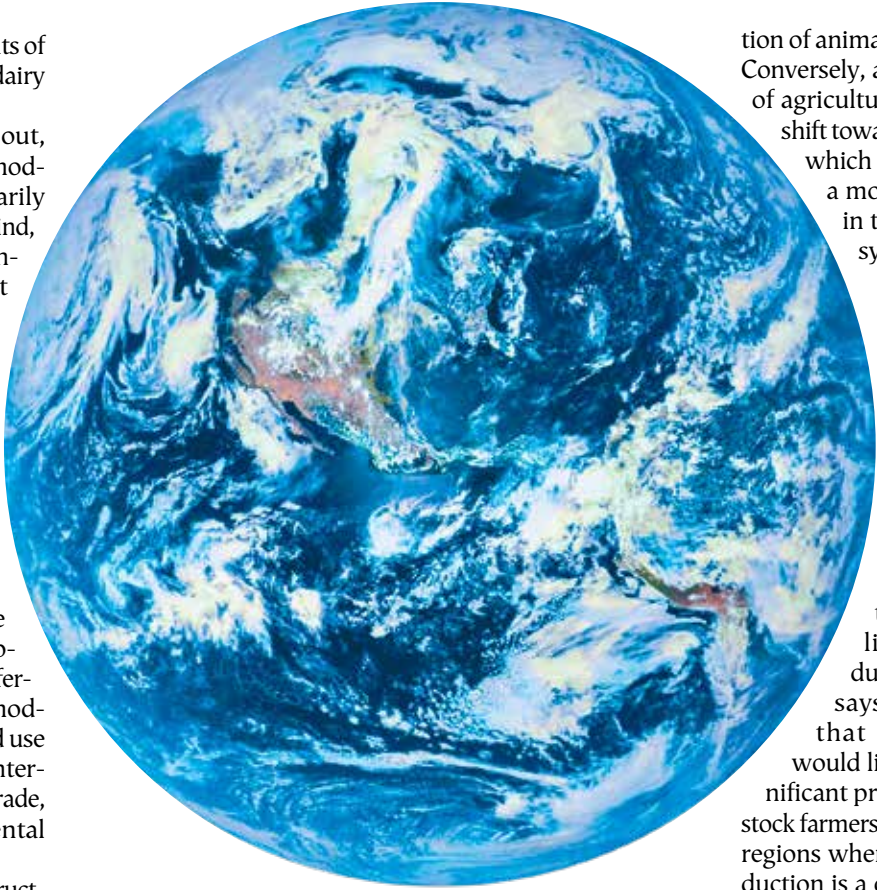
sions. Therefore, changing the way we produce and consume food can play an important role in addressing the climate crisis," Gibson says.

As he explains, the scenario examined in the study could reduce direct annual emissions by around 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (1 GtCO₂e), without including the additional benefits resulting from reduced deforestation.

At the same time, changing dietary patterns is not only about the environment. The global adoption of healthier eating habits could prevent millions of premature deaths each year.

"If the world continued along the path of current dietary and agricultural trends, we would continue to see millions of premature deaths related to diet, while the hidden costs of today's food systems would continue to rise," the researcher says.

As Gibson emphasizes, today's food production systems carry substantial economic and environmental costs, placing pressure on ecosystems and contributing to the transgression of critical planetary boundaries. The major challenge will be transitioning to a more sustainable system without leaving behind the people and communities whose livelihoods depend on it.



Why More Greeks Are Choosing Camping for Summer Vacation

With nearly half of Greeks unable to afford a weeklong vacation, organized campgrounds are gaining ground as a cheaper alternative that also offers nature, flexibility and a sense of community



Armenistis Camping Beach in Greece.

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According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), nearly one in two people (46.6%) cannot afford the cost of a one-week vacation, which inevitably makes camping a more affordable option. Renting a campsite for a family with a large tent during the peak season of July and August can cost 40 euros per night, while a room starts at 60 euros at best. The question, then, becomes “tent or camper”.

Christos K., 39, decided to spend his summer vacation at an organized campground in the Peloponnese with his wife and their two children. As he tells *TO VIMA*, despite the high cost of highway tolls, the overall expense at the end of the day is significantly lower than staying in a room. “For families with children, campgrounds, particularly at destinations that are not on islands, are an extremely economical option. Generally speaking, they are well organized, offer spacious pitches and shade, and have everything you need, from cafés, bars and restaurants to mini-markets and clean restrooms.”

Another reason more and more Greeks are choos-

ing camping is that it offers a different kind of experience. Being just steps away from beautiful beaches, coupled with the fact that the same people often return to the same place the following summer, creates friendships, relationships and communities. “Every member of the family becomes attached to the place, the beach, the wider area and the people,” says Christos, who began researching potential campgrounds during the winter because of high demand.

Two sides of the coin

On social media, pages dedicated to camping in Greece have thousands of followers. But the growing interest of recent years is also evident in the real world, not just online. According to ELSTAT’s latest available data on campgrounds, from 2024, arrivals increased by 3.2%, while businesses recorded 2,191,364 overnight stays, 1,317,772 of them by international tourists. All of these figures were

higher than the previous year. Konstantinos Demiris, president of the Panhellenic Camping Association, believes the number of arrivals and overnight stays will be even higher in 2026. “From what my colleagues tell me, they’ve had a good year so far. Particularly during the low season, in May and June, figures were higher than in the past. Overall, we believe the year will be positive in most areas.”

International visitors outnumber Greeks at organized campgrounds because, unlike foreign tourists, Greeks tend to associate camping exclusively with summer. “Foreign visitors come throughout the year,” Demiris says. “In winter, there are also many retirees or families with young children who are not yet in

school. That is why several seaside campgrounds remain open during the winter as well. But interest among Greeks has now increased considerably.”

There is, however, a paradox: while overnight stays are increasing, so too, Demiris tells *TO VIMA*, is the number of people sleeping on beaches or near organized camping facilities. Wild camping in Greece is illegal and, under the law, can result in administrative fines and even criminal penalties. So how can both official overnight stays and the number of people camping outside designated sites be increasing? “We are confusing the concepts of staying and camping,” Demiris says. “A ruling was issued saying that if, for example, you sleep in your camper at

night, that does not constitute camping. But if you put a table and chair outside, it does. So people come to Greece in their motorhomes and vacation for free. The state does not protect us.”

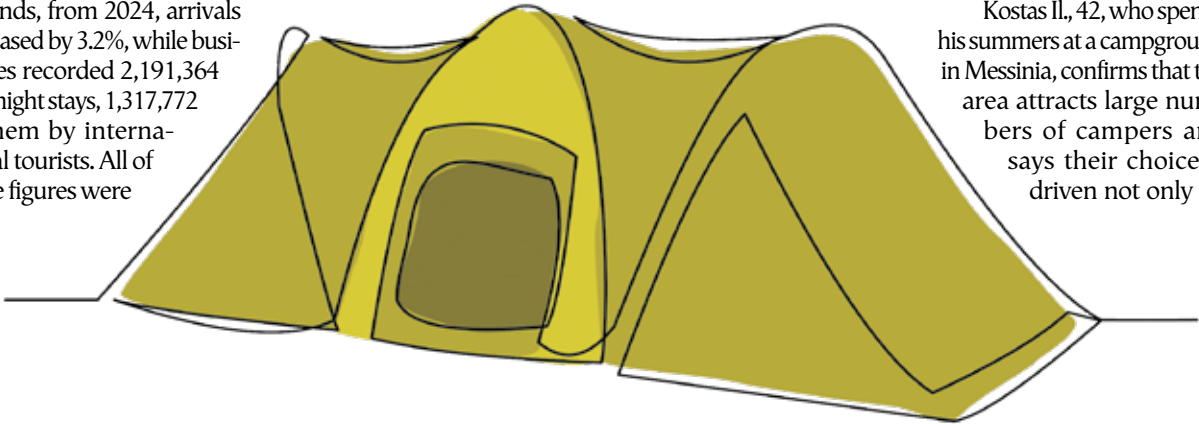
Halkidiki comes out on top

The area that traditionally attracts the largest number of campers, Demiris says, is Halkidiki, with the broader Central Macedonia region recording the highest numbers overall. “The Peloponnese and the areas around Argos, Nafplio, Koroni and Gytheio also attract a lot of people. We need to understand that campgrounds have changed. They offer many services and activities, including sports and games. You can do all sorts of things while staying just a few yards from the sea.”

Kostas Il., 42, who spends his summers at a campground in Messinia, confirms that the area attracts large numbers of campers and says their choice is driven not only by

cost but also by the flexibility each campground offers. “Of course, there are compromises, mainly when it comes to comfort and privacy. On the other hand, it gives you greater freedom in your daily routine and much more direct contact with nature. Another thing that stands out about camping is that you interact much more with the people around you. Shared spaces and everyday life make it easier to develop a sense of community, something you generally don’t experience to the same extent when staying in a room or hotel.”

For Demiris, a true summer vacation is one that weakens our attachment to technology. “Many parents prefer camping for another reason, and a lot of them tell us this often. They are happy to see their children making friends with the neighbors. They all play together and find things to do. At home, they are constantly in front of screens, but here they forget that cellphones even exist. Then the same thing happens again the following year. One person brings another, they coordinate their vacations and the group gets bigger. It’s very nice to see.”





Are Shops Closed in Athens in August?

Visiting Athens in August? Find out why shops close and what stays open

By Maria Paravantes

You’ve made it to Athens, dropped your bags off at the hotel and head out to explore. Is it just you, or does the Greek capital seem strangely empty and quiet? Welcome to Athens in August... and this is what you need to know. Of the roughly 3.6 million people living in the wide-

er Athens metropolitan area, more than one million residents leave the city during August. This is known as the “August exodus” in Greece. And there’s a very good reason. What happens on the Greek islands in the winter, applies very much so in Athens and Thessaloniki,

Greece’s two largest cities, in August. Welcome to “All About Greece”, part of “TO BHMA International Edition Travels Greece With You” series. Here, we answer your questions and introduce you to this wonderful country we call home and you call vacation!



Why August?

Traditionally, August is vacation time for Athenians, who head to their villages, to the islands and to mainland beaches for some sea and sun. Traditionally, August has been the favorite vacation month for the Greeks. Not by chance. This practice is very much tied to August 15th – the biggest national holiday in Greece after Orthodox Easter. “Dekapentavoustos” (the 15th of August) is the largest Greek summer happening dedicated to the Holy Mother, the Panagia (Virgin Mary). This religious feast is known as the Assumption or Dormition (Koimisis tis Theotokou) of the Virgin Mary, and commemorates Her “falling asleep” and ascent to heaven. In the past, many Greeks living in Athens and other urban centers had family roots in villages and smaller towns. August was when they would head back home to visit their families and reconnect with friends. The August 15 holiday was the perfect occasion to do so, and many city-dwellers would also take their annual vacation around this time. The result? The big cities emptied. With so few customers around, many shop and business owners began closing for part or all of August. Over time, this became a deeply established summer tradition. Even factories and companies operated on skeleton staff and still do! Today, that tradition lives on. Many Athenians still leave the capital for the islands, to go on their dream vacation, or to visit their family villages for a few days of sea, sun and respite.



Will everything be closed?

You’re bound to see this sign on many shop, cafe and bar windows in Athens, in August. So I’m sure you’re wondering: will everything be closed in Athens in August? The short answer is no. Shops with handwritten or makeshift signs in windows and on doors are usually individually- or family-owned. These are the businesses most likely to take an August break. In the past, it was not unusual for stores to close for most or even all of August. If you were staying in Athens, you had to plan ahead. After 2010, and the economic crisis, things changed. Many businesses now close for only a week or two, while some take just a few days off in the runup to August 15. Large supermarkets, shopping centers and malls generally remain open, as do hotels. Gas stations, however, as well as pharmacies do not. The good news is that although many pharmacies close for their summer holidays, there is a system in Greece of on-duty pharmacies (“efimerevonta”), meaning there will be drug stores open in each area when others are closed. You can find out which pharmacy is on duty online, through local listings, by calling 14944, or by checking the notice posted outside a closed pharmacy. Gas stations are a little less predictable. Many along major roads and highways remain open, but finding one operating in the city center can be difficult, particularly around and on the August 15 holiday. Tourist-oriented businesses also tend to be open. So you’re most likely to find shops open in seaside suburbs along the Athenian Riviera like Glyfada, Voula, Faliro, and in the Plaka neighborhood in the city center. The same applies to many restaurants and cafes. So if you have your heart set on eating at a particular restaurant in Athens, or want to go to a popular bar, make sure to check Google Maps and their official website or Facebook page, or better yet, call first. August opening hours can change.



Will tourist attractions be open?

Major tourist attractions in Athens, like the Temple of Olympian Zeus, remain open in August. This is where things get easier. Major tourist attractions, including museums and archaeological sites, generally operate according to their published holiday schedules. So again, I’m sure you’re all wondering if there will be things to do in Athens. Well yes, in fact, I would take advantage of the somehow empty city and do lots of walking. Athens is a leading tourist destination, so areas around the historic center and near major attractions remain lively. Many of you have asked if visiting Athens in August is a bad idea. I wouldn’t say it is. You won’t have the massive crowds and the city will be quieter and easier to explore - especially for those of you who love walking and wandering, which is by the way the best way to get a feel for a city. Head to the historic center, stroll along the Areopagitou pedestrian walkway at the foot of the Acropolis, head to the Ancient Agora, up to Pnyx Hill or Philipappou Hill, enjoy lunch in the Anafiotika in Plaka, check out the changing of the guard at Syntagma Square. So yes, there’s plenty to do in Athens even in August. And for us locals, staying in Athens in August is a blessing, we finally get to take it slow. The biggest drawback when visiting in August is the heat. So some quick advice: plan ahead, check opening hours and make restaurant reservations where necessary. One more thing: enjoy Athens in August, it’s cool and laid back... an entirely different city.

If you spot the Greek word κλειστό (klisto) anywhere on a store window, it means the store is closed.

*Send your questions to Maria Paravantes at mparavantes@tovima.com