

CRETE TRAVEL GUIDE



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Top 10

Ancient Knossos

Knossos is steeped in mystery and enchantment. In legend, it was the seat of King Minos, beneath whose palace the bull-headed Minotaur hunted its victims in the labyrinth built by Daedalus. In reality, it was the hub of a Bronze Age empire that held sway over the Aegean more than 4,000 years ago. This part of the Knossos story only began to be unearthed at the beginning of the 20th century, when British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans began excavations of the site.

Many of the exhibits at Knossos are copies – the originals are preserved at the Irakleio Archaeological Museum

Top 10 Sights



1 Central Court
All Minoan palaces were built around a central courtyard. This would have been the hub of the complex and would probably have been used for ceremonial purposes and for royal

audiences. The courtyard of Knossos has a commanding view of the valley.

2 Piano Nobile
Evans dubbed this expansive room on the upper floor of the palace building the “noble hall”, believing that it might have been the audience hall of the ancient Minoan kings. Its walls are decorated with copies of the fabulous frescoes of agile, leaping bull dancers – the most famous images of Knossos.

3 Dolphin Frescoes
The queen’s rooms were lavishly decorated with frescoes of leaping dolphins and well equipped with a bath and even a flush lavatory.

4 Storehouses
The storehouses or “magazines” contain giant earthenware jars called pithoi, which the Minoans used to store olive oil, olives, grain and other supplies. Such jars, with a capacity of up to 200 litres, were used by later Greeks over the next four millennia, and are still made today.

5 South Portico
The imposing south gateway to the palace complex has been partially restored, and is decorated with copies of the flowing Procession fresco, the original of which (like the other dazzling finds from Knossos) may be seen in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum. The roof of this porch was originally supported by four tapering wooden columns.

6 Great Staircase
Three smaller stairways and a maze of corridors would once have led off the five broad, shallow stone steps of the grand staircase. Four of these wide steps survive, and a copy of the original Shield fresco which was found here decorates this part of the palace complex.

7 Hall of Double Axes

The hallway leading to the King’s chamber is named after the double-bladed axe symbols carved into its walls and columns. The double axe was a characteristic symbol of Knossos and its empire.

8 North Entrance Passage
A fresco of a charging bull, one of the enduring symbols of Knossos, adorns the entrance to this passage. Either side of the entrance are ruined chambers and deep stone storage pits. Images of sacred bulls outlasted the enigmatic Minoan civilization and helped foster the legend of the Minotaur.

9 Throne Room
Here, a stone throne – supposedly that of King Minos – stands next to a basin. The basin is believed to have been used for ritual purification, perhaps before sacrifices were made to honour the gods.

10 Bust of Sir Arthur Evans
A bust of Evans stands at the site entrance, honouring the man who first traced the legendary palace of King Minos to this hillside above Irakleio. His broad reconstructions of the ancient palace owe much to his imagination.

Archaeologists in Crete

1 Arthur Evans
Arthur Evans was born into a wealthy British family and educated at Oxford, where he later became keeper of the prestigious Ashmolean Museum. Crete’s liberation from Turkish rule in 1897, three years after his first visit to the site, made it possible for him to begin work in 1900, and he devoted the next three decades to Knossos.



2 Harriet Boyd-Hawes
Harriet Boyd (Boyd-Hawes following her marriage) arrived on Crete in 1901 and, after hunting for promising sites, surprised the archaeological world by unearthing at Gournia a complete Minoan town (see Gournia).

3 Nikolaos Platon
The instincts of Greek archaeologist Nikolaos Platon led to the rediscovery in 1961–2 of the unplundered, overlooked palace site at Zakros (see Zakros). The important clue was the natural harbour – Platon suspected the site had once been an important trading city.

4 John Pendlebury
Pendlebury, who continued Evans's work at Knosos, is one of the most colourful figures in Cretan archaeology. He explored much of the island on foot and by donkey, pinpointing dozens of important sites. He also became a hero to Cretans after dying in action against the invading Germans in 1941.



later unearthed the palace sites at Phaestos and Agia Triada.

6 Richard Seager
Among the first American scholars to work in Crete, where at the beginning of the 20th century he excavated the Minoan site at Vasiliki, before starting work at Mochlos (see Mochlos), where American archaeologists are still at work together with Greek researchers.

7 Joseph Hadzidakis
Crete's own Joseph Hadzidakis pioneered the search for relics of the island's distant past, winning permission from the Ottoman sultan to set up the Cretan Archaeological Society in the 1880s. The Society played a key role in locating and preserving Crete's important sites, and in setting up the Irakleio Archaeological Museum (see Irakleio Archaeological Museum).

8 Alan Wace
The prominent director of the British School at Athens, Wace clashed with the opinionated Arthur Evans when his discoveries at Mycenae on the mainland led him to claim (correctly) that the Mycenaean culture had not been an offshoot of the Minoan but had existed independently and eventually had come to control Knosos.

9 Minos Kalokairinos
Cretan businessman and amateur archaeologist Kalokairinos began the first dig at Knosos in 1878, finding fragments of Mycenaean pottery and large pottery storage jars. His discoveries brought Knosos to the attention of Heinrich Schliemann.

10 Heinrich Schliemann
A rich and famous archaeologist fascinated with the world of Homer's epics, he discovered first the site of ancient Troy (in Turkey), then Mycenae (in mainland Greece). In 1887 he turned his attention to Crete, but died before his researches could bear fruit, leaving the field open for Arthur Evans.

Ancient Knosos

Practical information

- Map K4
- Route 97, 5 km (8 miles) south of Irakleio
- 2810 231940
- Summer: 8am–7pm daily; winter: 8am–6pm daily
Closed national holidays
- Adm €5.50
- Disabled access difficult

Top tips

- If possible, visit Knosos in spring or autumn, when cooler weather makes exploring more pleasant than in high summer. But if you are holidaying in peak season, get to the site as soon as it opens, before most coach tour groups have arrived.
- There are several tavernas and snack bars within a few steps of the site entrance, along the main road to Irakleio.

Chania



Chania is Crete's prettiest (and second largest) town, with colourful old Venetian buildings ringing a sheltered harbour that is guarded by sturdy fortifications. To the south are the treeless peaks of the Lefka Ori (White Mountains), sometimes snow-covered to June. Good beaches lie to the west and on the Akrotiri peninsula to the east. As well as Venetian ramparts and churches, a scattering of old Turkish buildings are reminders of the 250 years of Turkish rule.

Top 10 Sights



- 1 Firkas**
Built to guard the harbour, this massive bastion now houses an eclectic Naval Museum, including a display about the Battle of Crete.



- 2 Chania Archaeological Museum**
The excellent collection includes Minoan pottery and clay tablets, Classical and Hellenistic sculpture and glassware, and some fine mosaics.



- 3 Municipal Market**
The market, housed in a 19th-century building, is best visited first thing in the morning. Local farm produce is piled high, including weird-looking fish on beds of ice. There is every imaginable variety of olive, herb and spice.

- 4 Cretan House Folklore Museum**
With its excellent collection of tools, looms, spinning wheels, rugs, wall hangings and embroidery, this museum reveals and preserves traditional Cretan village skills (see Folklore Museums).

- 5 Mosque of the Janissaries**
The Turks built this multi-domed building to set their stamp on Crete after the conquest of 1645. It is the oldest Ottoman building on the island.

6 Byzantine Collection Next to the Firkas, the Byzantine Collection covers the 1,000-year history of the Byzantine Empire, with displays of coins, jewellery and statuary, mosaics and some fine icons.

7 Etz Hayyim Synagogue Recently restored, the 15th-century synagogue was used by Chania's Jewish population until the German occupation of 1941–45, when they were deported to death camps by the Germans. A plaque bears the names of 376 Jews who died when a deportees' ship was inadvertently sunk by a British submarine.

8 Schiavo Bastion and Venetian Walls The massive Schiavo Bastion and the high walls either side of it are the best preserved of the landward section of the Venetian fortifications, built in the mid-15th century as the threat of Turkish invasion loomed. (No public access.)



9 Lighthouse Walk out to the little lighthouse at the tip of the Venetian harbour wall for a fine view of the waterfront, harbour entrance and city.

10 "Oasis Beach"/Kalamaki The beach, between the Chrissi Akti headland and Kalamaki, about 3 km (2 miles) from the city centre, is the best near Chania, with its long curve of sand and shingle, cafés and restaurants, parascending and water sports.

Chania

Practical information

- Map D2
- **Chania Tourist Office**
- Megaro Pantheo, Kriari
- 40 28210 92943
- 8am–2:30pm Mon–Fri
- Firkas 10am–4pm daily
- Museums Tue–Sun
- Market 7am–noon Mon–Sat

Top tips

- Chania is the best shopping spot on Crete. Designer beachwear and silver jewellery are in shops on Chalidon and the harbour. Cretan-style leather boots are found in cobbler's shops on Skridlof. The Cretan House Folklore Museum sells beautiful handicrafts.
- The priciest and noisiest restaurants line Akti Koundouriotou, the harbour esplanade. For cheap eats, try the streets east of Plateia Sindrivani.

Chania's Story

Chania's earliest settlers were Minoans. Later, in 520 BC, colonists from Samos arrived. From 1252 until 1645 it was mainly ruled by the Venetians, who fortified the town and harbour. However, Chania fell in 1645 after a 55-day siege and remained in Turkish hands until 1898. In World War II, Cretan civilians fought alongside Greek and British Commonwealth troops. The German garrison in Chania held out until May 1945.

Gortys



The ruins of Gortys, in the middle of the fertile Messara plain, date from a much later era than Crete's Minoan palaces. The large site, surrounded by trees, is less crowded than Crete's other top archaeological attractions, though it is just as impressive. It was probably first settled by the Minoans, but flourished later during the period of the Dorian city-states in the 6th century BC. In the 2nd century BC, Gortys defeated its rival Phaestos to become the leading Cretan city.

Top 10 Sights

1 Basilica of Agios Titos

The impressive remains of the tree-aisled basilica indicate that Christianity was already well established on the island by the 5th century, when the basilica was built. It is named after St Titus (Agios Titos), who accompanied St Paul the Apostle to Crete in AD 59 and became the first bishop of Crete.

2 Roman Odeion and Code of Laws

Built into the walls of a Roman odeion are stone slabs inscribed with a code of laws, dating from about 500 BC. This is regarded as Gortys' most significant archaeological feature.

3 Praetorium

A courtyard and stumps of marble columns are all that remain of the palace of the Roman governor of Crete and Libya.



4 Temple of Pythian Apollo

Built in the 7th century BC, the temple had a monumental altar added in the Hellenistic period and was converted into a Christian church in the 2nd

century AD.

5 Roman Baths

Remnants of the baths, which would have been a social hub of the Roman city, can be seen among olive groves south of the Praetorium.

6 Temple of Isis and Serapis

Ancient Crete had links with ancient Egypt, as shown by the remains of this temple dedicated to the Egyptian deities.

7 Museum

A collection of marble statuary unearthed at Gortys is on display in a small pavilion on the site, though many of the more impressive finds are held at the Irakleio

Archaeological Museum. The onsite collection includes images of gods, emperors and Roman notables.



8 Roman Amphitheatre

The Roman amphitheatre is surprisingly small for a settlement as important as Roman Gortys, but its tiers of stone seats are well preserved and it is easy to imagine it in use as

a venue for drama, oratory or gladiatorial combat.

9 Roman Agora

An impressive statue of the god of healing, Asklepios (now in Irakleio Archaeological Museum), was discovered at the Roman Agora. The agora, or marketplace, was the heart of any ancient Greco-Roman city.



10 Acropolis (Kastro)

Outside the main site, formidable Roman ramparts and a small tower, known as the Kastro ("castle") stand guard on a low hilltop. Come here for a bird's-eye view of Gortys and the countryside.

Gortys

Practical information

- Map J5
- 1 km (half a mile) from Agioi Deka
- 28920 31144
- 8am–7pm daily
- Adm €2.00

Top tips

- To combine your visit to Gortys with an afternoon swim or an overnight stop, drive to Matala, 30 km (20 miles) east of Gortys, which has a fine sandy beach.
- Instead of using the rather spartan onsite cafeteria at Gortys, head for the nearby village of Agioi Deka, where there are several pleasant tavernas and a historic church.

Byzantine Gortys

After the Roman conquest of 65 BC, Gortys became capital of the Roman province of Crete and Cyrene (modern Libya). It continued to flourish as an important Byzantine provincial hub until, with the weakening of the Byzantine empire, it was sacked by Saracen invaders in the late 7th century AD. It was finally abandoned by its inhabitants in 824.

Gournia



Unearthed by the American archaeologist Harriet Boyd Hawes between 1901 and 1904, Gournia is the best preserved Minoan town in Crete, though it receives few visitors. Its layout, with narrow stepped streets and tiny houses, is surprisingly similar to that of Cretan villages to this day. It is also one of the oldest sites, inhabited from around 3000 BC, though the surviving buildings date from the later Second Palace Period. Like other Minoan settlements, it was destroyed by earthquake and fire around 1450 BC. The honeycomb of ruins stands only waist high.



Remains of workshops

Top 10 Sights



1 Courtyard
At the southern end of the site an expansive courtyard would have been the hub of the settlement and may have been the town's market. It was probably also used for

ceremonial purposes.



2 Stairway
The L-shaped stair that rises from the courtyard to the central court of the palace is characteristic of Minoan palaces. The design of it echoes similar ceremonial stairs found in virtually every Minoan palace site in Crete.



3 Central Palace Court
Access to the central court of the palace from the courtyard below is by the ceremonial staircase. The Minoan ruler of Gournia may well have used this antechamber to the small palace building as his audience hall.

4 Palace
The palace, which may have been the dwelling place of a governor who ruled Gournia on behalf of the Minoan ruler of Knossos, is a miniature version of the more important Minoan royal palaces. In the centre of the palace is a sacrificial altar.



5 Storerooms
Adjoining the palace are storerooms, or magazines, where grain, oil and other essentials would have been kept in earthenware jars.

6 Shrine
A cobbled, mosaicdecorated path leads steeply up to a small shrine, which was found to contain cult objects. The terracotta goddess figurines and snake are now displayed in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum

7 Carpenter's Workshop
Gournia was clearly a thriving, self-contained community, and tools and other materials found in this small building indicate that it was used by a woodworker who may also have lived on the premises with his family.



8 Potter's Workshop
Clay fragments indicate this was a potter's workshop. The finds unearthed in this and other buildings indicate Gournia was suddenly abandoned rather than slowly run down.

9 Bronzsmith's Workshop
Bronze nails and scraps, and a simple stone anvil suggest a smithy used in smelting bronze. Tools, weapons, utensils and votive objects from Gournia are at Irakleio Archaeological Museum.

10 Wash Basins
The crude stone washing basins found outside almost every building in Gournia are known as gournes in modern Greek. They gave their name to the long lost site when it was rediscovered.

Gournia

Practical information

- Map N5
- South of coast road, 18 km (11 miles) east of Agios Nikolaos
- 28420 93028
- 8:30am–7pm Tue–Sun
- Adm €1.50

Top tips

- Unfortunately, the beaches near Gournia (like most along this stretch of coast) are dirty and unappealing.
- There is nowhere to eat at Gournia. Pachia Ammos, 3 km (2 miles) east, has a string of restaurants on its waterfront.

Lost Names

Although some Minoan scripts have been deciphered, archaeologists still have no way of knowing what the Minoans called most of their cities. The names by which they are known today stem from words used by the much later Greek settlers who occupied the island long after the collapse of Minoan civilization.

Irakleio



A massive medieval fortress still guards the harbour where the galleys of the Serene Republic of Venice once moored. Centuries-old churches and drinking fountains are other reminders of Irakleio's Venetian era. Busy open-air markets and the island's most fascinating museum are also attractions. Find a café table on one of the recently restored central squares and watch the busy everyday life of a small Greek town, or browse the markets for Cretan antiques and delicacies to take home.

For a morning's walk in Irakleio (see [A Morning in Irakleio](#))

Top 10 Sights

1 Archaeological Museum

Irakleio's Archaeological Museum is one of the finest in Greece, with finds from ancient Minoan, Greek and Roman cities (see [Irakleio](#), [Irakleio Archaeological Museum](#)).

2 Venetian Fortress (Koules)

The massive walls of the square fortress – the most imposing historic building in Irakleio – were strengthened by the Venetians as the Turkish threat grew during the 16th century.



3 Venetian Arsenal

The great wooden war-galleys that gave Venice its maritime supremacy were built and repaired in vaulted arcades on the harbourfront opposite the fortress.

Wooden fishing boats are still hauled up here for maintenance.

4 Historical Museum of Crete

The museum's proudest possession is the only painting by El Greco to have been retained in the artist's native Crete. There are also some lovely stone pieces (see [Historical Museum](#)).



5 Morosini Fountain

Carved stone lions, the symbol of St Mark, decorate a small fountain in the hub of Irakleio's old quarter. It is named after a great 17th-century Doge of Venice. Sadly, it is often dry.



6 Market

The old market has striped awnings and counters piled high with everything from live snails to a myriad varieties of olive.



7 Museum of Religious Art

The world's finest collection of Cretan icons is displayed in a pretty 15th-century church. Colourful, glowing depictions of saints and martyrs, some of them in

elaborate silver frames, adorn the walls. There are three works by Michailis Damaskinos: the Adoration of the Magi, Last Supper, and Christ Appearing to the Holy Women.

8 Natural History Museum

Offers an impression of the Cretan landscape in Minoan times, before the importation of palm trees, eucalyptus and bougainvillea. There are also stuffed animals, fossils and crystals.

9 Museum of the Battle of Crete

This small collection highlights the German invasion of 1941 and the Cretan resistance to German occupation from 1941–45. There are photographs, documents, weapons and uniforms.



10 Venetian Bastions
Irakleio's Venetian walls are surprisingly intact, though among a concrete tide of modern buildings. The best place to appreciate the fortifications is from outside the Chania Gate, with its

elaborate carving. Next to it is the massive Pantokratoros Bastion.

Irakleio

Practical information

- Map K3
- Greek National Tourism Organisation, 1 Xanthoudidou
- 28102 28203
- 9am–9pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm weekends

Top tips

- To see the market at its best, arrive early, when the stalls are still piled high. The market remains open all day, Monday to Saturday, but most produce traders have packed up by midday.
- Plateia Venizelou is lined with pavement cafés and a good place for a cold drink and a rest after a morning exploring the market and city.

Irakleio's Story

The Saracens who occupied Crete in the 9th and 10th centuries built a stronghold on the site of an earlier Roman-Greek settlement named Irakleio after the Greek hero Herakles (Hercules). Under Venetian rule, the name was corrupted into Candia. It reverted to its original name after independence from Turkey. The city was heavily damaged by bombing during World War II, but rose again to become Crete's official capital in 1971.

Irakleio Archaeological Museum



Founded in 1937 to house the growing treasury of finds from Crete's newly rediscovered archaeological sites, Irakleio's Archaeological Museum gives a dazzling insight into the marvels of the first sophisticated European civilization, which flourished here more than 3,000 years ago. Among the most famous and striking exhibits are the frescoes from Knosos, jewellery, symbol seals and Minoan double axes, as well as the enigmatic Phaestos Disc, with its symbols written by people of the ancient world.

Top 10 Exhibits

1 Hall of Frescoes

The most exciting and impressive of the museum's displays are the lively, colourful frescoes from Knosos, Agia Triada and other palaces. They seem to offer a real link between the past and present.

2 Ayia Triada Sarcophagus

The elaborately painted stone coffin is adorned with depictions of animal sacrifices, a funeral procession, women and goddesses riding chariots pulled by slaves and mythical beasts. It was perhaps made for a Minoan ruler.

3 Phaestos Disc

The secret of this clay disc, embossed with symbols believed to be the earliest example of a form of printing, has yet to be revealed. The hieroglyphics on the disc, which was found at Phaestos in 1903, are the earliest known Minoan script.

4 Bull's Head Rhyton

This 16th-century BC wine vessel is carved from black steatite stone and has gilded horns, rock crystal eyes and a mother-of-pearl snout. It was discovered at Knosos and probably used in ritual.

5 Faience Figurines of the Snake Goddess

Found at Knosos, the figures carry a snake in either hand, as do some later depictions of the goddess Astarte, suggesting some continuity between ancient Crete and later Hellenic cultures.

6 Jug of Reeds

With its dark pattern of reeds painted on a lighter background, the graceful pottery jug is the finest example of work from the New Palace era (1700–1450 BC).

7 Minoan Jewellery and Helmets

Gold necklaces, rings, earrings, seals, sword hilts and helmets are among the treasure trove of finds from Knosos, Phaestos and Gortys.

8 Town Mosaic

Glazed tiles, each depicting multi-storey buildings of the Minoan era, were originally part of a mural decoration which may have graced the wall of a palace.

9 Gaming Board

A decorative gaming board, elaborately inlaid and decorated with rock crystal, gold and silver leaf, turquoise paste and ivory, shows that ancient Crete had a wealthy, leisured class as well as trade links with other ancient civilizations.

10 Miniature Figures

Doll-like figurines of people and animals look like toys but are believed to have had a religious purpose as votive offerings. Most were found in mountain sanctuaries and caves, such as the Diktian (Psycho) Cave (see Diktian Cave).

Irakleio Archaeological Museum

Practical information

- Plateia Eleftherias/1 Xanthoudidou 711, Irakleio
- 2810 226092
- 8:30am–7pm Tue–Sun
- Adm €1.60

Top tips

- In 2001 work began on an extensive reorganization of the museum. The creation of a new lower floor has revealed remnants of ancient buildings. Some exhibits, including the Giamalakis Collection, may not be on display while the excavations are still being undertaken.
- Plateia Eleftherias, near the museum, is now pedestrianized and has a row of café terraces.

Museum Guide

The ground-floor galleries (Rooms 1–13) are arranged chronologically, anti-clockwise, beginning with Neolithic finds through to the Roman era. Rooms 14–18, including the Giamalakis Collection, are on the first floor. However, during the current modernization programme, the collections are subject to temporary reorganization and closure.

Phaestos



While Arthur Evans was reconstructing Knossos, the more meticulously scientific Italian scholar Federico Halbherr was unearthing the sites of two Minoan palaces at Phaestos, on a hilltop above the fertile farmlands of the Messara Plane. Most of the ruins visible today are remnants of the later palace (known as the Second Palace), built around 1600 BC and destroyed, possibly by a tidal wave, in around 1450 BC.

Top 10 Sights

1 West Courtyard and Theatre Area
Tiers of stone seats occupy the north side of the West Courtyard, a paved space that was used for rituals and theatrical ceremonies, including, perhaps, the bull-vaulting depicted in some Minoan frescoes. South of the courtyard are two well-like stonelined pits used for storing grain, and in the northeast corner are the remains of a shrine which was part of the earlier palace.



2 Grand Stairway
This broad, monumental stairway leads from the West Courtyard up to the remains of a propylon, or portico, and into a colonnaded lightwell. This was the main entrance to the

palace.

3 Central Court
This vast courtyard, formerly flanked on two sides by covered walkways, may have been a parade ground. Niches, perhaps for sentries, are recessed into walls by the main entrance.

4 Peristyle Hall
The stumps of columns lining this square space indicate that it was once a colonnaded courtyard. Beneath it are traces of an even more archaic building, dating from what is known as the Prepalatial period (3500–1900 BC).

5 Archive
This row of mud-brick coffers may have been the filing department. The Phaestos Disc, with its undeciphered hieroglyphics, was discovered here. It can be seen in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum.

6 Storerooms and Pithoi
The storerooms were where essentials such as grain, oil, wine and olives were kept in huge ceramic jars called pithoi. Several pithoi remain in the storerooms.

7 First Palace Remains

To the southeast of the site, the smaller ruins of the First Palace are fenced off for their protection. The palace was built c.1900 BC and destroyed about 200 years later.

8 Palace Workshops
The remains of a sophisticated kiln or bronze-smith's furnace stand in a large courtyard. Off the courtyard are small chambers which may have been workshops for the palace artisans.

9 Classical Temple
The remnants of a small temple built during the Classical era provide evidence that Phaestos was still lived in some 1000 years after the mysterious collapse of the Minoan civilization.

10 Royal Apartments
Now fenced off, these rooms were the grandest in the complex, consisting of the Queen's Chamber, the King's Chamber, a lustral basin (covered pool), and even a bathroom and lavatory with running water.

Phaestos

Practical information

- Map H5
- 8km (5 miles) west of Moires village
- 28920 42315
- 8am–7pm Tue–Sun
- Adm €4.00

Top tips

- The on-site Tourist Pavilion at Phaestos serves cold drinks and indifferent food, but there are several better (and cheaper) refreshments stops at Agios Ioannis village, including the Taverna Agios Ioannis, on the main street.
- For an overnight stop, head for the little resort of Matala, with sandy beaches and small hotels, less than 30 minutes drive from Phaestos.

Minoan Demise

What caused the sudden collapse of the Minoan civilisation? Many believe that it was the eruption of the volcano on the island of Thira (Santorini), which would have triggered great tidal waves and suffocating clouds of volcanic ash. Other explanations include invasion by the warlike Mycenaeans of the mainland. But all such theories remain speculative for now.

Rethymno

Rethymno, Crete's third largest town, has been occupied since Minoan times and flourished under Venetian rule. Built on a wide, shallow bay, it has a good beach at the heart of town, and an old quarter crammed with the tall windows and wrought-iron balconies of old-fashioned Venetian and Turkish houses. Several well-preserved mosques are relics of the Turkish era, and, along with the palm trees planted along its seafront esplanade, give the town a pleasantly exotic atmosphere.

For a morning's itinerary in Rethymno (see A Morning in Rethymno)

Top 10 Sights

1 Venetian Fortress (Fortetza)

Built in 1573, this imposing stronghold – one of the largest Venetian castles ever built – broods on a headland above the town. It has four sturdy bastions and three gates. Within the walls, the most interesting building is the Ibrahim Han Mosque, originally the Venetian Cathedral (see Venetian and Turkish Castles).

2 Historical and Folk Art Museum

Vivid woven rugs and hangings, fine lace, traditional pottery and magnificent silver and amber jewellery are among the relics of a vanished way of life that are preserved in this interesting little place. The collection is housed in an old Venetian town house.

3 Nerandzes Mosque

Rising above the old town's rooftops, the pointed minaret of the 17th-century Nerandzes Mosque is a prominent landmark of Rethymno and has a great view from its turret. Unfortunately, it is currently closed for renovation: contact the Rethymno Tourist Office for further information.



4 Rethymno Archaeological Museum

Opposite the main gate of the fortress, in a converted bastion (part of the fortifications added by the Turks), the archaeological museum's displays include finds from Neolithic, Minoan and Roman sites! (see Rethymno Archaeological Museum).

5 Rimondi Fountain

Water flows from an ornate fountain, built in 1626 by one of Rethymno's patrician families on the site of an earlier, simpler water source. Both Venetians and Turks endowed various cities with numerous public fountains.



6 Venetian Loggia (Lotzia)

The most important architectural reminder of Venice's long reign is now a shop selling museum-grade reproductions of Classical works of art.

7 Franzeskaki Collection

Rethymno was one of the most important centres of dyeing, weaving and embroidery in Crete, and the Franzeskaki Collection at Epimenidou displays marvellous examples of these decorative textiles.



8 Inner Harbour

The small inner harbour, below the fortress, is one of the most picturesque in Greece, with ramshackle old houses, small boats at anchor and a busy quayside.



9 Venetian Gate (Porta Guora)

The only remnant of the city's Venetian fortifications is an arched stone gate, leading from the picturesque old quarter into the modern part of the city. Other gates were dismantled to provide better vehicle access.



10 Beach Rethymno's town beach starts just east of the main harbour breakwater and stretches eastward. Behind it is an esplanade lined with palm trees planted in the 1990s, and an almost continuous chain of openair cafés and restaurants.

Rethymno

Practical information

- Map F3
- Rethymno Tourist Information Office, Eleftheriou Venizelou
- 28310 29148
- Apr–Oct: 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat
- Fortress 8am–8pm Tue–Sun
- Museums Tue–Sun

Top tips

- Visit Rethymno in July to enjoy the annual wine festival in the public gardens.
- Rethymno's bustling harbour front caters almost exclusively for tourists. Head for the quiet alleys of the old quarter for cheaper, less crowded and often more authentically Cretan restaurants.

Muslims and Hajjis

Rethymno's many Turkish features hint at a multi-ethnic past. Until Crete's independence in 1908, the town had a large Turkish Muslim population. Many later moved to Rhodes, which was then still under Turkish rule. The common Cretan name prefix "Hadzi" is a reminder of that era, originally indicating a Cretan who had made the pilgrimage ("Haj" in Turkish/Arabic) to the Holy Land.

Samaria Gorge

The Samaria Gorge, which cuts its way through the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) from the Omalos Plateau to the Libyan Sea, is one of the most striking areas of natural beauty in Greece. Peaks soar on both sides of the gorge, flanked by pine woods and wildflower meadows. Beginning 1,250 m (4,100 ft) above sea level, it emerges on the coast close to the little village of Agia Roumeli after passing through the narrow Sideresportes or "Iron Gates".

Top 10 Sights



1 Xyloskalo
The zig-zag path down through the gorge is called the Xyloskalo. The toughest part plummets a breathtaking 1,000 m (3,300 ft) in little more than 2 km (1 mile), passing through pine and cypress woods along the way.

2 Gigos and Volakia Peaks
Above the Xyloskalo to the west, the skyline is dominated by the massive peaks of Gigos and Volakia. These mountaintops may remain snow covered well into early summer when the temperatures at sea level are scorching.

3 Neroutsiko and Riza Sikias
The springs of Neroutsiko and Riza Sikias meet at the foot of the Xyloskalo. In winter they form a fierce torrent that makes the gorge impassable, but in summer they dry to a trickle.

4 Church of Agios Nikolaos
Not far from the foot of the Xyloskalo and the springs, the tiny, roughly built chapel of Agios Nikolaos stands in the shade of pine and cypress trees, next to an official rest area.

5 Samaria
The last dwellers in the gorge abandoned this village in 1962 when the area was designated a national park. The ghostly cottages have become ever more derelict.

6 Osia Maria
Dwarfed by steep cliffs, the small church of Osia Maria contains 14th-century frescoes and lends its name to the village of Samaria and to the gorge itself.

7 Sideresportes
Near the shrine of Afendis Christos, the gorge narrows to just 3 m (9 ft) of space separating rocky walls that rise 700 m (over 2,000 ft).

8 Tarra (Old Agia Roumeli)
A crumbling Turkish fort, a ruined Venetian church and a few tumbledown cottages are all that remain of

the old village of Agia Roumeli. Below these ruins lies the site of the small Hellenistic city state of Tarra.

9 New Agia Roumeli
The inhabitants of Agia Roumeli abandoned their village in the 1960s, intent on a new location by the sea. The new village has since grown into a cheerful string of tavernas and guesthouses spread out along a single street.

10 Agios Pavlos Beach
Just east of Agia Roumeli, Agios Pavlos beach is a long, uncrowded stretch of pebbles. It is named after the tiny chapel here dedicated to St Paul.

Samaria Gorge

Practical information

- Map C4
- Gorge open May–mid-Oct, 7am–7pm daily
- Forest Guardhouse, Xiloskalo
- (28210) 67179
- Forest Guardhouse, Agia Roumeli
- (28250) 91254
- Admission charge €3.50
- Keep your datestamped ticket, which you must hand in at the Agia Roumeli gate as you leave

Top tips

- Though fit walkers can complete the 11-mile (17-km) trek in about five hours, it is best to allow eight, including a break of at least an hour. Rest in the hottest part of the day in summer.
- Take plenty of water – at least one litre per person. There are designated rest areas where you can picnic in the shade, and at Agia Roumeli there are small tavernas for your recuperation.

Getting Around

Several tour companies run daily escorted walks, which include transport to and from the gorge. There are also regular buses from Chania to Omalos, 1 km (half a mile) from Xiloskalo. Independent walkers must report to the Forest Guardhouse at Xiloskalo before setting out. There are many guesthouses in Agia Roumeli, and while no roads service this stretch of coast, ferries run daily to Chora Sfakion and Sougia.

The Amari Valley and Mt Idi



The remote Amari Valley, overlooked by the summit of Mt Idi, is one of the most scenic regions in Crete, dotted with tiny village churches – some of them more than 700 years old – and olive groves and vineyards. This upland region is surprisingly fertile, thanks to topsoil washed from the surrounding slopes, and in the Byzantine era was among the wealthiest regions in Crete. A heartland of the Cretan resistance struggle in World War II, many of its villages were destroyed by the Germans in retaliation for attacks by Cretan guerrillas.



Panagia at Thronas

Top 10 Sights



1 Mt Idi (Psiloritis) Summit

Towering above the remote valley, the 2,456-m (8,060-ft) peak of Mt Idi, also called Ida and Psiloritis, is the highest mountain in Crete. Marked walking trails (see Climbing

Mt Idi) lead to the summit from the Nida Plateau, 23 km (14 miles) by road from Anogeia village.

2 Idaian Cave

According to Greek myth, Zeus, chief of the Olympian gods, was raised in this enormous cavern, 20 minutes' walk from the Nida Plateau. In ancient times this was a place of pilgrimage. Artifacts such as bronze shields, which were left as offerings to Zeus in the 8th century BC, are in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum. The cavern is open daily.



3 Amari Village

A Venetian clocktower on the main square is one of the older buildings in the valley. Just outside the village, some of Crete's oldest Christian frescoes, dated 1225, are in Agia Anna church.

4 Kamares Cave

This cave, where remarkable Minoan pottery known as Kamares ware was discovered, is a four-hour trek

from Kamares village. This sacred site was dedicated to the goddess Eileithyia.

5 Hromonastiri
The church of Agios Eftihios, at the village of Hromonastiri, contains faded frescoes, dating from the 11th century, which may be the oldest of their kind in Crete.



6 The Memorial to Peace
German artist Karen Raeck's work, to the north of the Nida Plateau, is a winged figure outlined in huge natural stone boulders.

7 Thronos
The 14th-century church of the Panagia at Thronos contains striking frescoes and traces of mosaics from an earlier basilica. Nearby are the ruins of a Hellenistic city.



8 Moni Asomaton
The monastery of Asomaton, built in the Venetian era, is now deserted and spooky. It stands in a fertile oasis of plane trees, palms and eucalyptus.

9 Agios Ioannis Theologos
The church of St John the Divine, built in the 13th century, stands by the road just north of Kardaki village. The fine frescoes were painted in 1347.

10 Fourfouras
A pretty village set in stunning mountain scenery, Fourfouras is one of the jumping-off spots for the ascent of Mt Idi and some of the less challenging hikes on the Psiloritis massif.

The Amari Valley and Mt Idi

Practical information

- Map G-H4
- Greek National Tourism Organization, Eleftheriou Venizelou, Rethymno
- 28310 29148

Top tips

- Amari is the best base for exploring the valley and surrounding mountains on foot. There are several tavernas, rooms to rent and a post office where you can change money.
- Guided fossil-hunting and herb-gathering walks around the Amari Valley are organized by Lamvros Papoutsakis in Thronos village (28330 22760).

Getting Around the Valley

Though the Amari Valley feels remote, there are three buses daily from Rethymno to the two largest villages, Thronos and Amari. With a hired car, it is possible to drive up one side of the Amari Valley and down the other. Of the two roads, the eastern route is the most spectacular.

2

Practical Info

Getting To and Around Crete

1 Scheduled Flights

The only year-round way of getting to Crete is to fly to Athens and take a connecting flight to Irakleio, Chania or Rethymno. There are flights to Athens from all EU capitals and from major cities in North America, South Africa and Australia. Domestic airlines compete on routes, and flights are frequent.

2 Charter Flights

Charter airlines owned by large package holiday companies fly to Chania and Irakleio from most airports in the UK and large mainland EU cities in summer. The first departures are in late April or early May, with the last return flight in early October. Most flights are sold as a package with accommodation and car rental.



3 Ferries

Fast ferries sail overnight, every night, between Piraeus, the port of Athens, and Chania, Irakleio and Rethymno on Crete. Another popular option is to island-hop, staying for a few nights on one or more of the Cyclades.



4 Car Hire

There are local and international car rental companies at every airport, resort and major town in Crete. Renting on the spot is often more expensive than booking in advance with a

major firm. Drive defensively and cautiously at all times – Greece has one of the worst accident rates in Europe.



5 Buses

Local buses operated by the KTEL consortium are a cheap and cheerful way to see Crete and meet local people. Tickets are cheap and there are regular departures even to remote

villages. English language timetables are usually available from local tourist offices.

6 Taxis

Taxis are surprisingly affordable, and operate not only in towns but on long journeys between towns and villages. Short journeys are metered, but for longer trips there is usually a fixed price – agree it before setting off. Most drivers speak some English, and vehicles are usually modern Mercedes saloons.

7 Local Boats

The only way to travel between Sougia and Chora Sfakion on the south coast is by boat. In summer, small

boats putter along at least once a day, calling at Agia Roumeli and Loutro.

8 Riding

Mule or pony trekking is a great way to explore the awesome mountain scenery of the Lefka Ori (White Mountains), where there are still no motor roads.

9 Bicycle

Away from the north coast and its busy highway, there are hundreds of miles of farm tracks and jeep roads which are ideal mountain-biking territory. Cycling is best enjoyed in spring (April–May) and autumn (late September–October).

10 Motorbikes and Scooters

Two-wheeled transport is popular with summer visitors. However, great caution should be used, both on busy roads and off-track. Helmets are compulsory only for riders of larger motorcycles outside town limits, but should be worn at all times (see Renting a Motorbike).

General Information

1 When To Go

December, January and February are cold, wet and windy with heavy snow on the mountains. Spring flowers begin to appear in March, but sunbathing is not a real option until April, and rain is possible until May. Temperatures start to climb seriously in June, peaking at 35°C or higher in July. October can be beautiful, with sunny days and cool nights, and even November can be a good month for sightseeing, though not for the beach.

2 Passports and Visas

UK visitors require a passport; most other EU nationals require only a valid identity card. Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not require visas for a stay of up to 90 days.

3 Customs

Visitors from other EU countries are not subject to customs formalities. Unauthorized export of antiquities and works of art is a serious offence. If bringing prescription drugs with you, also bring a copy of the prescription and, if possible, a letter from your doctor to say why you need them.

4 Tourist Offices Abroad

The Greek National Tourism Organisation, also known as the Hellenic Tourist Organisation and referred to by its Greek acronym, EOT, has offices in all European capitals, major US cities, and in Australia and South Africa.



5 Tourist Offices in Crete

EOT has offices in Irakleio, Chania and Rethymno. There are also local tourist offices in the major resorts. All have English-speaking staff who can provide maps, bus

timetables, and lists of places to stay and things to see. Most will also help you to find accommodation.



6 Opening Hours
Opening hours on Crete are erratic. Use the times given in this book as a rough guide only. Most state-run museums and archaeological sites are open around 8:30am–3pm and close on Mondays. Some may reopen or stay open to 7 or 8pm in summer. Monasteries, convents and churches are generally open during daylight hours but close for two to three hours in the afternoon. Some smaller

churches may be locked: the key is usually held in the nearest village shop or kafeneion.



7 Etiquette
Speaking even a few words of the language often works wonders in establishing a rapport with Cretans. Modest clothing (long trousers for men,

over-the-knee skirts for women) is required when visiting monasteries and churches. Topless sunbathing is generally tolerated, but nude bathing is officially restricted to designated beaches.

8 Electricity

Greece uses the standard European 220V/50Hz AC electrical supply. Plugs have two round pins, or three round pins for earthed appliances.

9 Clothing

A sun-hat and sunglasses are essential. In spring and autumn, a light wool sweater or fleece and a light windproof and waterproof jacket are useful. Good walking boots are a must for serious hiking.

10 Useful Accessories

A small torch is good in places with little street lighting. Take at least a litre of water if you plan even an easy walk. Mosquito repellents are supplied in most guesthouses. A snorkel and mask, and compact binoculars are handy if you want to observe wildlife.

Things to Avoid



1 Sunburn
Never underestimate the burning power of the Cretan sun, which can be punishing as early as April. Use a high-factor sunscreen or sunblock, especially on boat trips, when the sea

breeze can make it seem deceptively cool, and take to the shade from midday until late afternoon.

2 Heatstroke

Heatstroke is another risk in high summer. Do not attempt strenuous hiking or mountain riding in July or August, drink plenty of water and wear a hat. Symptoms can be aggravated by alcohol – drink an extra half litre of water for each unit of alcohol you consume.

3 Mosquitoes

A night-time pest in many parts of Crete, mosquitoes breed in ponds, streams and cisterns. Out of doors, they can be kept away by deterrents containing diethyltoluamide (“deet”) or the organic citronella oil. Indoors, use an electrical deterrent pad, sold in shops all over Crete.

4 Sea Urchins

Spiky black sea urchins infest most rocky beaches and can inflict a painful wound if stepped on in bare feet. Watch where you walk in shallow water. The spines, which snap off in the wound, can be pulled out with tweezers.

5 Jellyfish

Jellyfish, called tsouchtres in Greek, occasionally infest Cretan beaches. Most are harmless but some can inflict a painful sting. Rinsing with vinegar or a mild ammonia solution is an effective remedy, and an antihistamine tablet and cream will also reduce inflammation.

6 Snakes

Crete has numerous snakes, most of which are completely harmless and none of which have a lethal bite (though the adder, rarely seen sunbathing on sunny rocks in the mountains, has a venomous bite). Most Greek villagers will kill any snake, venomous or not, on sight, and all Cretan snakes will flee when humans approach.



7 Renting a Motorbike

Many visitors with no previous experience of riding a motorbike or scooter rent a cheap and cheerful two-wheeler, and each year brings its crop of accidents.

Riding in Crete is risky, even for experienced bikers. The inexperienced should stick to four wheels. If you must rent a bike, wear a helmet at all times. Wear long trousers and a jacket, which give you a bit more protection than shorts and T-shirt if you do take a tumble.

8 Kamakis

The native male kamaki (“harpooner”) is a summer phenomenon. These amateur gigolos are convinced that female visitors are intent on an authentic Greek holiday romance, and are more than happy to supply it. Most will take a firm “no” for an answer.

9 Hornets

These large, red and black cousins of the wasp inflict a very painful sting and should not be handled or provoked. They are often seen hovering around pools of water or drinking fountains, but will not attack if left alone.

10 **Photographing Military Installations**
Greek authorities are extremely sensitive on issues of national security, as a group of British plane-spotters discovered in 2002, when they were arrested and convicted of espionage after taking photographs of Greek Air Force warplanes. Do not take photographs of military airfields (which often adjoin civil airports), army bases or radar installations (which are dotted around Crete's coasts and mountains), or naval vessels (even in civil harbours), or you are likely to be charged with spying. Prohibited sites are signposted with the symbol of a camera barred by a red stripe.

Special Interest Holidays

1 **Archaeology**
The ancient palace sites and ruined cities of Minoan and Hellenistic Crete can be confusing without a guide. Escorted tours featuring in-depth exploration of Knossos and other sites, with guest experts and slide shows, are offered by several companies.

2 **Wildlife and Ornithology**
The best times to seek out Crete's people-shy animals are spring and autumn, when specialist eco-tourism operators offer wildlife and walking holidays in Sfakia and the Mt Idi range.

3 **Walking and Hiking**
Crete's highest mountains offer some of Europe's most inspiring wilderness walking, but can be lethal to inexperienced or lone walkers. Small group treks led by experienced guides can be safer.

4 **Riding**
Pony or mule-riding expeditions through the Cretan countryside and into the Lefka Ori are a new development.



5 **Cycling**
A number of specialist companies offer accompanied cycling holidays in Crete, usually in spring and autumn, when it's not too hot for comfort, with most of your luggage

travelling ahead of you by minibus each day and back-up transport available if the going gets too tough.

6 **Painting**
Spring is the most popular time for painting holidays in Crete, when the clear light and multicoloured blaze of wild flowers provide inspirational subject matter. Some painting holidays can be combined with tours of archaeological sites and wildlife areas.

7 **Music and Dance**
Cretans are justifiably proud of their rich, living heritage of traditional music and dance, and eager to share it with visitors. A growing number of holidays, usually with accommodation in village homes, enable you to learn some of the complicated dances.



8 **Windsurfing**
The strong summer breezes which spring up most afternoons make Cretan coasts ideal for windsurfing. Most major tour operators offer packages with windsurfing coaching at major resorts such as Georgioupoli and Chersonisos.

9 **Diving**
Scuba diving is another burgeoning pastime in Crete. Many wrecks lie in shallow waters not far offshore, and visibility is excellent. Most ancient shipwrecks are off-limits to divers, but there are plenty of wartime wrecks to explore.



10 **Cruising and Island-Hopping**
Cruise vessels from a number of major cruise lines call at Cretan ports including Chania and Rethymno as part of itineraries which also include ports of call on the mainland and other islands. Multi-centre island hopping holidays including a stay in Crete are also offered by some specialist companies.

Budget Ideas

1 **Off-Season Travel**
The cost of living rockets from mid-June to early September. Accommodation, air fares to Crete, and car and scooter rental are lower in spring and autumn. The best time of all for a budget visit is early October, when the sea is warm and there is still plenty of sun but few visitors.



2 **Cheap Flights and Ferries**
Flying to Athens, then travelling on to Crete by ferry can be cheaper than flying direct to Crete. At least four scheduled airlines fly daily to Athens from London alone,

and there are also charter flights in summer, so fares are competitive. If coming from outside Europe, look for a cheap fare to London and a connecting flight to Athens or Crete.

3 **Discounts**
The longer you intend to stay in one place, the cheaper your room will be. Pensions and hotels usually offer a 10 per cent discount for three nights or more, and you may get an even better rate if staying for several weeks. Most museums and archaeological sites offer cheap admission for students and school pupils.

4 **Youth Hostels**
There are youth hostels in Irakleio, Chersonisos, Rethymno, Siteia and Plakias, with dormitory beds (for around one-third the cost of a cheap room) and basic kitchen facilities.



5 Camping
Camping can save you some money, with most campsites charging around half the cost of a budget room for a tent and two people. On the downside, few campsites are easy to get to using public transport, and camping means carrying a tent.

6 Working Holidays
Finding casual work picking fruit or olives is less easy than it was, as migrants from Albania and other eastern European countries provide a supply of cheap labour. Bar and restaurant work in resorts is very poorly paid (most earnings are from tips), with very long hours. If you have a degree in English you may find work teaching in a private language school. In theory, EU citizens do not need work permits.

7 Hitch-hiking
Hitching can be a good way of getting around the island (especially to out-of-the-way spots), and Cretans themselves frequently hitch-hike. Off the beaten track, where there is little traffic, you may have to wait for hours in hot sun.



8 Cheap Eats
Giros stands (see *Giros* (Kebab) Stands) offer the cheapest tasty hot meals in Crete. Markets are piled with inexpensive fruit in summer, and if you stick to picnicking on fruit, olives, cheese and

freshbaked bread (the healthy diet of the Cretan villager), you can live on surprisingly little. In restaurants, Greek salad (onions, cucumber, tomatoes, olives and a slab of feta cheese, drowned in oil) is a cheap meal in its own right. Fish is always the most expensive dish on any menu, and chicken and squid are usually the cheapest.

9 Drinking and Entertainment
A half-litre bottle of beer or a half-litre of wine in an old-fashioned local café is usually half the price of a smaller beer or a fancy cocktail in a smart café-bar. Admission to most discos and clubs in resorts is free, but drinks are expensive. Make the most of half-price happy hour in lively resorts like Chersonisos and Malia.

10 Resorts to Avoid
Budget travellers should avoid the purpose-built north coast resorts – including Elounda, Malia, Chersonisos, Bali and Georgioupoli – which cater to a captive market of high-spending holidaymakers.

Health and Security Tips

1 EKPIZO

The EKPIZO organization helps tourists who encounter problems with hotels, campsites, car rental and tour companies while in Crete.

2 Travel Insurance
You should take out comprehensive travel insurance covering you for private medical treatment and for evacuation if necessary, as well as for loss or theft of belongings and expenses incurred due to delayed or cancelled flights. Make sure your policy will pay for medical and hospital fees direct and that it covers you for holiday activities such as trekking, scuba diving, riding, and motorcycling, as well as for personal liability in the event of damage to rented cars or motorcycles.



3 Minor Ailments
Sunburn and heat exhaustion and mosquito bites are easily prevented (see Things to Avoid). A basic medical kit should include painkillers, anti-histamine tablets and cream for bites and stings, a diarrhoea remedy, and motion sickness tablets for boat or bus journeys.

4 Insects and Pests
Hornets, scorpions, tarantulas and vipers all exist in Crete but are not dangerous unless handled. Their bites and stings are painful but not normally lethal to adults, though medical attention should be sought if small children are bitten.

5 Breakdowns and Accidents
Set up a warning triangle if possible – your hire car should be equipped with one. If anyone is injured, passers-by are required to stop and help, and you must contact the police. If involved in a collision, never admit liability, sign any statement of responsibility, or lose your temper. Contact your travel insurance company as soon as possible.

6 Doctors
There are private medical clinics in all the main towns. Many doctors speak good English. Consultations must be paid for in cash.

7 Dentists
Dentists are proficient and can be found in major towns including Irakleio, Chania, Rethymno, Agios Nikolaos, Siteia and Ierapetra. You must pay for your treatment in cash.

8 Hospitals
Greek public hospitals leave much to be desired, but private hospitals and clinics are as good as any in the world. Make sure your insurance covers private treatment.



9 Pharmacies Greek pharmacists are highly qualified, provide comprehensive advice on minor ailments and injuries, and can dispense a wide range of remedies including antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and painkillers. Most speak good English. Pharmacies (farmakia) are marked by a green cross sign.



10 Crime Crete has a very low crime rate and is one of the safest holiday destinations in the world. However, thefts from tourists do occur (often perpetrated by other foreigners). Take sensible precautions, including locking rental cars and hotel rooms, keeping passports, tickets and spare cash in hotel safes, and watching your belongings in public places.

3

Shopping

Shopping Tips

1 Shop Opening Times

Cretean markets are busiest and best early in the morning, opening at about 7:30am Monday to Saturday, and busiest of all on Saturday mornings. Markets, and all other shops, close around midday, reopening around 5pm and staying open until at least 8pm. In resort areas, many shops are open until around 11pm in summer.

2 Tax and Allowances

Non-EU residents can reclaim Value Added Tax (VAT) on most goods by presenting the relevant receipt at Customs on departure. Non-EU travellers can also buy wines, spirits, tobacco, perfumes and other goods in duty-free shops at Chania and Irakleio airports.

3 Prices and Bargaining

Bargaining over prices is not common practice in Crete, and most ticket prices are fairly firmly fixed. That said, it never hurts to ask for the best possible price, especially in art and craft shops. Prices are often notably cheaper at the very end of the holiday season, when custom is on the wane.

4 Cash or Credit?

Most traders and shop owners (as well as restaurant and small hotel owners) prefer cash to credit cards, and usually pass on to you the percentage charged by the credit card company, which can be as much as 5 per cent.

5 Wine

Aided by modern wine-making techniques, Greek wines are coming into their own, and the vineyards of Crete are no exception. The Boutari wines are among the best, and you can buy quality wines to take home in most towns and at airports.



6 Herbs

Crete is famous for the healing and cleansing properties of its wild mountain herbs, which are gathered, dried and exported in bulk all over Greece. Take home a big bag of sage, oregano, thyme or basil, sold loose or in packages in the markets of Chania, Rethymno and Irakleio.



7 Olives and Olive Oil

Olives and olive oil have been staples of the Greek diet since ancient times, and the olive groves of Crete produce some of the best. Cold pressed virgin olive oil is the key ingredient of many

dishes, and quality oil (you really can taste the difference) is much cheaper in Crete than at home.



8 Pottery

Pottery-making is a living skill on Crete: look out for prettily coloured, modern bowls, plates and cups, simple old-fashioned peasant earthenware, or copies of elaborately decorated

Minoan, Classical or Hellenistic ceramics.

9 Carved Wood

Unique to Crete is the curly wooden stick carved from prinos wood, which is the mountain shepherd's versatile tool, used to carry burdens, discipline dogs and encourage stubborn mules. They make handsome wall decorations. You may also find attractive bowls and platters turned from hard, close-grained olive wood.

10 Icons, Antiques and Handicrafts

Original icons of saints, archangels and apostles command colossal prices, but good copies can be bought from specialist dealers, and from museum shops in Irakleio and Chania. Look out too for antique daggers, silver pen and tobacco cases, meerschaum pipes and flintlock pistols – but beware of fakes. The colourfully striped blankets and rugs woven from sheep's or goat's wool are easy to carry home, as are the beautifully embroidered textiles for which Cretan village women are famous.

Top 10 Traditional Shops

1 Xilouris Popular Art, Anogeia

The ancient art of handloom weaving.

► *Milopotamou*

2 Cretan Handicraft, Mirthios

Vividly coloured weavings, shepherds' sticks, embroidery, lace, herbs, wines, raki and olive oil.

► *74060 Mirthios*

3 To Maxairadiko, Chania

The best of a clutch of traditional knifemakers on the street.

► *18 Sifakas*

4 Voskakis Workshop, Amari Valley

Nikos Voskakis hand-carves olive wood platters, bowls, dishes, candle sticks and cutlery.

► *Blzari*

5 Nikos Siragas, Rethymno

Artistic wood-turner acquiring an international reputation for his beautiful handmade bowls, vases and works of art.

► *Petaloti 2, Rethymno*

6 Landen Apan, Chania

Traditional foodstuffs of Crete.

► *Daskalogianni 70*

7 Ypsanta Selinou, Paleochora
Tiny shop on a nameless lane, with tapestries, rugs and lace.

► *Off main street*

8 Top Hanas, Chania
Wonderful stock of old Cretan rugs, blankets and kilims.

► *3 Angelou*

9 Roka Carpets, Chania
Cretan textile weaving.

► *Zambeliou 61*

10 Komboloi 52, Chania
Old-fashioned rosaries made from olive wood, amber, jet, turquoise etc.

► *Dimotiki Agora 52*

Markets and Shopping Streets

1 Chania Market, Plateia Venizelou, Chania
The market building is a Chania landmark and bustles with vendors and shoppers. A visual feast and also the place to buy herbs, olive oil, dried fruit, honey and typical Cretan souvenirs, such as the tiny metal pots used to brew Greek coffee.

► *Map D2/B6*



2 Odos Skridlof, Chania
Running through the centre of the old quarter, this has been a street of saddlemakers and cobblers for centuries, perhaps even millennia. These days, satchels, sandals and handbags abound.

► *Map D2/B6*

3 Boutari Winery, Archanes
The best wines in Crete (and from other parts of Greece) can be tasted and bought in this new visitor centre at Crete's top winery on the Fantaxommetochto vineyard (see Boutari Winery and Audio-Visual Show).

► *70100 Archanes • 2810 752004 • Map K4*

4 Odos 1866, Irakleio
Irakleio's main market street and a great place to shop for Cretan herbs and tisanes. It also offers an insight into the Cretan diet – along with the olives, you will see buckets of live snails for sale.

► *Map K3*



5 Odos Daedalou, Irakleio
Named after the legendary inventor of the Labyrinth (see The Minotaur and the Labyrinth), this road is rather more upmarket than Odos 1866, and is lined with shops selling jewellery and linen and cotton clothes to summer visitors.

► *Map K3*

6 Museum Shops
For quality replicas of finds from the archaeological sites of Crete, visit the Museum Shops, in the former Venetian Loggia on Odos Paleologou in Rethymno and in the Byzantine Museum in Chania.

► *Map Q2 & A5*

7 Local Products Exhibition, Farmers' Union of Siteia
Promoting the produce of local farmers, this co-operative venture is well worth visiting just to see how the vines and olives of Crete are grown and processed. It is also a good place to pick up quality olive oil, very drinkable wines and raki, Crete's favourite spirit.

► *Map Q4 • 28430 25200*



8 Odos Souliou, Rethymno
Rethymno's up-market shopping street, lined with stores selling copies of Minoan pottery, traditional Cretan pottery and modern ceramics, as well as colourful cotton and linen, lace and embroidery.

► *Map F3/Q2*



9 Odos Ethnikis Andistasi, Rethymno
The most photogenic market in Crete spills out – as indeed it has for centuries – from openfronted shops and stalls along Odos Ethnikis Andistasi and around the Venetian Porta Guora. Go early in the morning, when it is in full cry and waiters bustle from stall to stall with coffee and raki.

► *Map F3/Q2*



10 Odos Dimitrakaki, Rethymno

An open-air street market takes place every Thursday along Odos Dimitrakaki, beside Rethymno's public gardens. It starts early in the morning and winds down by midday. It is a rather patchy affair, but can sometimes be fascinating.

► **Map F3**

4

Places to Eat and Drink

Eating and Drinking Tips



1 Traditional Cafés

The old-fashioned *kafeneion* is a hub of village and town life, where local men gather to play backgammon and talk politics. They usually serve only Greek coffee, frappé (iced coffee), ouzo and raki, Greek brandy, bottled beer and a limited range of soft drinks.

2 Ouzeris and Mezedopoleion

These are the Greek equivalent of the Spanish tapas bar, serving ouzo, wine, beer and a range of snacks (*meze*) to accompany your drink. In a mezedopoleion you can order a complete meal of a dozen tiny dishes.

3 Pastry Shops

The *zacharoplasteion* (patisserie) is evidence of the Greek love of all things sweet. You will find honeysoaked *baclava* and an array of pastries stuffed with raisins and nuts and powdered with sugar and cinnamon, cream-filled pies and chocolate *gateaux*. The *zacharoplasteion* also serves coffee and sometimes a range of liqueurs and spirits.

4 Fish Restaurants

The *psarotaverna* (fish tavern) serves every imaginable kind of seafood, from tiny whitebait to whole sea bass, shrimp, octopus, squid, langouste and less familiar delicacies, including sea urchins. Fish is officially classed category "A" (the most expensive) through "E" and is priced by weight.

5 Grill Restaurants

The *psitesteatoreon* or grill restaurant is a carnivore's delight and a vegetarian's nightmare. The typical menu comprises chicken, lamb and pork, spit-grilled and served with chips and salad. Less familiar dishes include *kokoretsi* (liver and other offal wrapped in intestines and grilled) and sheep's head.

6 Giros (Kebab) Stands

The ubiquitous *giros* (pronounced "hero") is Greece's own greasy and delicious fast food – slivers of veal, pressed into a vertical cylinder and cooked on a revolving grill, shaved off and served in flat pitta bread with onions, tomatoes, yoghurt and a dash of cayenne pepper. *Giros* stands are strategically located in most towns and larger villages.



7 Café-Bars

Neon-lit, gleaming new café-bars cater to holiday crowds in main resorts and to younger Greeks in towns such as Irakleio, Chania and Rethymno. They serve expensive imported lagers,

iced coffee, soft drinks and disturbingly powerful cocktails, usually based on locally made vodka, tequila, rum or gin.



8 Raki and Wine

Tsikoudia, or *raki*, is Crete's fiery traditional tipple, and is served neat in tiny glasses, sometimes first thing in the morning with coffee. Cretans rarely drink more than one at a sitting; nor should you. Wines include pine resin-flavoured *retsina* (sold straight from the barrel or in 500 ml bottles) and drinkable red and white wines from Crete and elsewhere in Greece (see Top 10 Cretan Wines).

9 Beer

Lager beers including Amstel and Heineken are brewed under licence in Greece and sold in 500 ml bottles. Local brands including *Mythos* and *Fix* (the first beer brewed in Greece, introduced by a Bavarian brewer in the 1840s), also in 500 ml bottles. Café-bars also serve imported brands including Budweiser and Beck's. Bottled Newcastle Brown Ale, Guinness and British keg lagers on draft are served in some holiday resorts.

10 Water and Soft Drinks

Greek tap water is perfectly safe to drink, but many visitors and Greeks themselves prefer the taste of bottled mineral water. Virtually every resort shop has a fridge stuffed with mineral water, cola, lemonade and other soft drinks.

Cafés and Ouzeries

1 Pagopoleion, Irakleio

A remarkable café-bar set in the city's old icehouse, serving Italian, Greek and iced coffee all day long. The decoration includes mementos of the building's past, including the old ice lift.

► *Platia Ayios Titos* • *Map K3*



2 Aroma, Chania

With tables on the east side of the harbour, *Aroma* is a popular rendezvous for young locals. Fine views of the harbour and a pleasant place for breakfast, morning coffee, an aperitif or

after-dinner drinks.

► *Akti Tombazi 4* • *Map D2/B5*



3 Fortetza, Chania

Delightful café-bar midway along the mole that encloses the Venetian harbour. The best place in town for a sunset drink, with views across the water to the old town.

► *Palaio Limani* • *Map D2/B4*



4 Pallas Café, Chania
This elegant rendezvous in an old Venetian mansion on the harbour opens early and stays open late. It has tables on the quay, up on a roof terrace and inside, within rooms prettily

decorated with frescoes.

➤ *Afendoulief* • **Map D2**



5 Anemos, Paleochora
A colourful ouzeri-bar, just a few steps from Paleochora's eastern waterfront and ferry dock, serving delicious snacks and light meals, well-priced beers, wines and cocktails. All drinks are accompanied by generous portions of traditional meze. Friendly service, good music and a lively Greek atmosphere.

➤ *Paleochora 73001* • **Map B4**



6 Café Antico, Rethymno
A prettily decorated and newly opened café, opposite Rethymno's Rimondi Fountain and close to some of the best shopping in town.

➤ *Plateia Petihaki* • **Map F3/Q2**

7 To Ellinikon, Rethymno

A clutch of cafés and bars are crammed cheek by jowl into Petihaki, among them this ouzeri which serves tasty snacks, and raki and ouzo for those who have acquired a taste for Cretan-style spirits.

➤ *Petihaki* • **Map F3/Q2**

8 To Araxovoli, Rethymno

This ouzeri-restaurant next to Rethymno's Town Hall is more authentically Cretan than most, serving good mezes and fish dishes, as well as a plethora of drinks, including, of course, a choice of rakis and ouzos. Often live traditional music at night.

➤ *34 Iroon Polytehniou* • **Map F3**

9 Anna Bei 1900, Ierapetra

As well as a proper restaurant, this all-purpose nightspot also has a traditional café and ouzo bar, serving meze in the courtyard of an attractively restored old building (see Anna Bei 1900, Ierapetra).

10 Kali Kardia, Siteia

Frequented more by locals than visitors, Kali Kardia ("Good Heart") makes few concessions to tourist tastes. Authentic meze, from local cheeses to grilled snails, are washed down with strong Cretan retsina straight from the barrel.

➤ *Foundalidou 28* • **Map Q4**

Restaurants



1 Ela, Chania

Within the courtyard of an old Venetian mansion, Ela serves a wide menu, including standard Greek dishes and a few authentically Cretan offerings.

➤ *42 Kondylaki* • 28210 74128 • **Closed Nov–Mar** • €€€

2 Dino's, Chania

The best restaurant around Chania's delightful inner harbour, serving an extensive choice of seafood, from octopus and whitebait to langouste and sea bass.

➤ *3 Akti Enoseos* • 28210 41865 • €€€€

3 Tamam, Chania

A wide range of Greek, Levantine and Cretan dishes, with a better choice of non-meat dishes than most of its rivals.

➤ *49 Zambeliou* • 28210 96080 • €€€€

4 Karnagio, Chania

Karnagio serves substantial taverna meals, the traditional favourites including grilled meats and huge peasant salads with feta cheese.

➤ *8 Katehaki* • 28210 53366 • **Closed Nov–Mar** • €€€



5 Veneto, Rethymno

Set in 13th-century vaults beneath the Veneto Hotel, the restaurant serves Cretan specialities within a beautiful setting, with stone-flagged floors, mosaics and antique furniture.

➤ *4 Epimenidou* • 28310 56634 • €€€€€

6 Avli, Rethymno

With its pretty garden setting, this is one of the town's finest. Mainly grilled and roasted meats, and Cretan favourites such as apatzia sausages and roasted goat.

➤ 22 Xanthoudidou • 28310 26213 • €€€€



7 Kyria Maria, Rethymno

This little taverna in the old quarter serves plain, village-style dishes. It fairly bustles in the evenings but is quieter at lunch time. Great value.

➤ 20 Moschovitou • 28310 29078 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€

8 Taverna tou Zissi, Rethymno

On the old Irakleio highway, 4km (2 miles) east of Rethymno, Zissi's charcoal-grilled lamb and chicken are worth the short trip from town.

➤ Missiria • 28310 28814 • €€€

9 Oriental Bay, Paleochora

This quiet restaurant serves Cretan and other Greek dishes and is very popular with locals. Pleasant courtyard.

➤ East Beach • 28230 41322 • Closed Nov–Mar • €

10 Sterna tou Bloumfisi, Vamos

Part of a restored 19th-century stone village, Sterna tou Bloumfisi serves Cretan specialities baked in woodburning ovens.

➤ 28250 22932 • €€€

Meze Dishes

1 Octopus (Oktapodi)

A favourite accompaniment to a glass of ouzo, raki or retsina is a dish of octopus chunks, cooked in oil, herbs and vinegar, and served cold.

2 Marides

Tiny whitebait are coated in flour, flash-fried and served with a slice of lemon as a snack or a first course.

3 Loukanika

These smoked and spiced pork sausages are a typically Cretan snack, served more often in winter.

4 Baked Potatoes

Another typical winter snack served in mountain village ouzeries, often cooked in a wood-burning stove in the middle of the café.

5 Saganitika

A strongly flavoured cheese that is frequently served fried or grilled as a meze dish.

6 Karpousi

Sweet and refreshing pink cubes of chilled watermelon are among the most popular summertime meze.

7 Olives

You will see more than 40 different kinds of olive for sale in Greek markets. Their strong flavours complement a glass of retsina wonderfully.

8 Gigantes

A more substantial dish: large white beans simmered in oil, herbs and tomatoes. Served cold in summer.

9 Spanakopites

Tiny spinach pies made with flaky filo pastry.

10 Melitzanosalata

A delicious savoury dip made by pureeing grilled aubergines with herbs, usually served with crusty bread.

Top 10 Cretan Wines

1 Domaine Fantaxometochos

Excellent red wine made from Mantilaria and Kotsifali grapes. Good with lamb or chicken.

2 Chardonnay Boutari

Dry, white varietal wine – great with seafood and cheese.

3 Sauvignon Blanc Boutari

Dry white, ideal with vegetable dishes, cheeses and cold cuts.

4 Sant'Antonio

Produced from Kotsifali and Mantilaria grapes in the Peza region of central Crete by Miliarakis Brothers, this deep red wine is barrel-aged for five to six years.

5 Kokolakis

Ioannis Kokolakis bottles wines made from liatiko grapes grown in the Agrilos vineyards, not far from Siteia, which produce a light, dry red wine.

6 Kissamos

This potent red wine with a 13 per cent alcohol content comes from Romeiko grapes grown in Crete's north west.

7 Rodolino

Made from liatiko red wine grapes blended with white varieties, this rosé is best served chilled to the bone.

8 Clos de Creta

Unassuming white wine made from Romeiko grapes from the Kissamos area.

9 Domenico

Made from Vilana and Rozaki grapes, this is one of the better pine-flavoured retsinas.

10 Malvasia
One of Europe's oldest wines, Malvasia was exported as far as England by the Venetians. Made from a blend of sugar-rich, aromatic grapes, it is best drunk with dessert.

Bars and Cafés

1 Ciao, Irakleio
The big, breezy self-service café beside the Morosini Fountain offers cold drinks, snacks, pizza, pasta and cooked breakfasts.

► *Plateia Venizelou • Map K3*

2 The Four Lions, Irakleio
A rooftop café open from early morning until late at night. It offers a panoramic view of the older part of Irakleio as well as cold drinks, snacks, wines, spirits and cocktails.

► *Plateia Venizelou*

3 Ta Leontaria, Irakleio
Beneath the city walls, this old-fashioned patisserie serves Greek coffee, frappé, espresso and cappuccino, ices and cream-filled pastries.

► *Plateia Venizelou*

4 MoCafe, Irakleio
Handily located opposite the Irakleio Archeological Museum, MoCafe has a cool, arched interior with marble floor and an eclectic collection of modern art on the walls. It serves filled baguettes, juices, shakes, beers and coffee.

► *Odos Sapoutiel*



5 Paradiso, Agia Galini
Large music bar close to the harbour, which only gets going after dinner, then rocks into the small hours, with loud music and a young clientele.



Paradiso, Agia Galini

► *Taverna Street • Map G5*

6 Kafeneio, Matala
Bright and cheerful café-bar, offering fresh fruit juice and yoghurt for breakfast and cold drinks throughout the day. An internet café is upstairs.

► *Village square • Map G6*

7 Ouzeri Elisabeth, Malia
A quieter, more traditional island in Malia's sea of neon-lit cocktail bars. Choose from ouzos and meze and Cretan wine from the barrel.

► *Church square, Old Malia • Map M4*

8 Kipouli, Malia
Virtually 24-hour drinking is the main selling point of this bar, attracting those who like to party all night and sleep on the beach all day.

► *Centre of Old Malia • 5:50am–2am the next day*



9 New York, Chersonisos

On the beach close to the entrance of the harbour, New York starts the day as a beach bar serving breakfasts, snacks and cold drinks, and after sunset

metamorphoses into a noisy, lively music bar.

► *Map L3*

10 Hard Rock Cafe, Chersonisos
The international Hard Rock brand offers a familiar blend of cold beer, burgers and cocktails, attracting locals and visitors.

► *East end of Eleftheros Venizelou*

Top 10 Fish Served in Cretan Restaurants

1 Fagri
Red sea bream, prized for its delicate white flesh, is grilled and served whole and is one of the most expensive fish dishes on the menu.

2 Melanourgia
A large, silver-scaled fish with tasty white flesh; it's usually grilled.

3 Barbonia
Small red mullet appear on almost every tourist menu, pan-fried or grilled. Each fish provides only a few delicious mouthfuls – beware of bones!

4 Marides
Tiny whitebait are dipped in flour and shallow-fried, then served with shredded lettuce and a slice of lemon.

5 Lavraki
Sea bass is baked in olive oil, red wine vinegar and rosemary, served whole.

6 Sardelles
Sardines are often wrapped in vine leaves to seal in flavour and moisture, then grilled. Salted and pickled sardines are often served as meze.

7 Xifias
Swordfish keeps its flavour well when frozen, so is a favourite with restaurateurs.

8 Skorprios
The evil-looking scorpion fish is surprisingly tasty and essential in fish soup.

9 Tonnos
Tuna steaks are best savoured in spring and autumn, when tuna migrate through Cretan waters.

10 Gopes
Nondescript-looking, bony little fish that's the cheapest on the menu, but delicious once the bones are removed.

Tavernas



1 Sterna tou Bloumofisi, Vamos

Key part of a restored 19th-century stone village. The taverna serves a wide menu of Cretan specialities, baked in wood-burning ovens, and is open for

breakfast, lunch and dinner (see Sterna tou Bloumofisi, Vamos).

2 Ta Douliana, Douliana

A typical village taverna, set in the centre of tiny Douliana. Its rickety wooden tables and chairs are on a terrace shaded by vines, and the menu focuses on hearty local cooking, such as arni avgolemono (lamb with lemon sauce).

► *Centre of Douliana, on road between Kalive and Vamos • Map E3 • €€*

3 Kavouri, Limin Chersonisos Kavouri is one of the best places

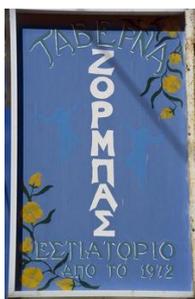
to eat in the Chersonisos resort area. The house speciality is tender lamb kleftiko, roasted slowly in a paper wrapping with garlic, lemon and herbs.

► *Archaïou Theatrou • Map L3 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€€*

4 To Farangi, Agia Roumeli

This family-run taverna is the best place to eat in Agia Roumeli (see Samaria Gorge) and serves sfakanies pites (pies topped with honey, a regional speciality), stuffed vegetables and vine leaves, grilled meat dishes and fish.

► *Centre of Agia Roumeli • Map C4 • Closed Oct–May • €€€*



5 Zorbas, Siteia
This big, old-fashioned taverna beside the harbour has not changed its traditional menu in decades. It serves meze as well as heartier meals, including mousakas and a range of grilled fish dishes (see Zorbas, Siteia).

6 Taverna tou Zissi, Rethymno

Zissi looks rather unprepossessing at first, housed in a drab concrete building. But inside, it serves some of the best food around. The charcoal-grilled lamb alone is worth a trip from Rethymno (see Taverna tou Zissi, Rethymno).

7 Marilena, Elounda

Marilena's menu concentrates on seafood, simply grilled and very fresh, and prices are not exorbitant by the standards of Elounda, which is generally the priciest place on Crete. Other Greek dishes have been adapted for foreign palates by using a little less oil (see Marilena, Elounda).

8 Vareladika, Irakleio

A pleasant, stylish and reasonably priced eating place close to the Venetian harbour. Vareladika has a tiny outdoor terrace where you can sample the wide menu of Cretan specialities, with wine served in copper jugs from the barrel.

► *Moni Agarathou 13 • Map K3 • €€€*



9 Taverna Auoas, Agios Nikolaos

Handily located close to the Archaeological Museum, this taverna serves a wide variety of well-prepared traditional Cretan dishes.

► *Paleologou 44 • Map N4 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€€*

10 Itanos, Agios Nikolaos

In a lane just off the main square, Itanos claims to be the resort's only authentic taverna – a claim that looks increasingly shaky as tourism continues to grow. Nevertheless, the taverna serves good, affordable Cretan meals and wine, and is always busy.

► *Plateia Venizelou • Map N4 • €€€*

Places to Eat

1 The Old Mill, Elounda

The most luxurious restaurant in eastern Crete, situated in the Elounda Mare Hotel (see Elounda Mare Hotel, Elounda). The menu combines the best of Greece with international cuisine. Booking essential; dress code formal.

► **Elounda Mare Hotel** • 28410 41102 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€€

2 Kalidon, Elounda
Dining aboard a floating pontoon moored in Elounda's small fishing harbour, with a mix of Greek and international dishes.

► **Elounda Harbour** • 28410 41451 • Closed Nov–Mar • €



3 Zorbas, Siteia
A long-established taverna serving freshly grilled fish and lobster, traditional Cretan dishes, charcoal-grilled meats and meze.

► **Harbourfront** • 28430 22689 • €€



4 Nikos Platanakis, Kato Zakros

On a terrace overlooking the sea, this restaurant serves fish, game and vegetarian meals.

► **Beachfront** • 28430 26887 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€

5 Kalliontzis, Koutsouras
This friendly taverna offers home-cooked meals, set at outside tables overhung by tamarisk trees.

► **Seafront** • 28430 51207 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€

6 Taverna Pelagos, Agios Nikolaos
A fine old taverna close to the fishing harbour, noted locally for its seafood. Its courtyard suits summer dining.

► **Korakaia and Katehaki** • 28410 25737 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€

7 Poulis, Elounda Village
Catering mainly for visitors, the menu encompasses Greek and international dishes, a long list of grilled seafood and a reasonable wine list.

► **Harbourfront** • 28410 41451 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€

8 Paragadi, Siteia
One of the best places for fish in Siteia, with tables overlooking the waterfront esplanade.

► **Karamanlis 8** • €€€

9 Porfira, Makrygialos
In the unlikely setting of cheap and cheerful Makrygialos, Porfira serves a gourmet menu of uniquely Cretan dishes, which staff are happy to guide you through.

► **Makrygialos** • 28430 52189 • Closed Oct–May • €€€



10 Marilena, Elounda
Simply grilled fresh seafood is what Marilena does best, though it also serves other Greek dishes, created with an appealing lightness of touch.

► **On the harbour** • 2841 41322 • Closed Nov–Apr • €€€

Nightlife



1 Chersonisos
If you're a summer party animal, Chersonisos is the place for you. Not far from the airport, this former fishing village has become a continuous strip of bars, clubs, restaurants and guesthouses stretching along one of Crete's best beaches. A multinational (but mainly British) clientele (see Chersonisos).

► **Map L3**

2 Malia
Malia rivals its neighbour Chersonisos as a nightlife hot spot. It has been a party town for some 30 years, and its main street is lined with cocktail bars, restaurants, video bars and dance clubs. Along this stretch, happy hour can last most of the evening (see Malia).

► **Map M4**

3 Platanias
Platanias is where most of Chania's younger residents go to party on summer weekends. There are at least a dozen great clubs, most with open-air dance floors, and things do not really start to get lively until well after midnight (see Platanias).

► **Map C2**

4 Chania
Music blasts out from most of the cafés and bars along the harbour front at Chania on summer evenings, and if you prefer an evening of bar-hopping and café-crawling to a night in the dance clubs there are few better places in the whole of Crete. Most younger Chaniots, however, desert the cafés for the clubs of Platanias after the toll of midnight (see Chania).

► **Map D2**



5 Agios Nikolaos
Agios Nikolaos has a surprisingly lively after-dark scene, compared with its day-time placidity. The town's nightlife hot spot is Odos 25 Martiou (running uphill from the southeast

corner of the harbour), where there are half a dozen or more music bars, with as many again around the harbour. The town's dance club scene is more limited, with only one or two full-on clubs (see Agios Nikolaos).

► **Map N4****6 Rethymno**

Most of the liveliest music-bars are in the streets inland from the harbour. Later on, the nightlife scene shifts to the open-air discos and clubs in the resort area, along the seafront east of the centre (see Rethymno).

► **Map F3****7 Irakleio**

Not many holidaymakers stay in Crete's capital (see Irakleio), so its nightlife scene is more staid than in the resorts. Young locals congregate in the cafés and music bars around Plateia Venizelou and Odos Chandakou, but the discos near the harbour are rather seedy.

► **Map K3****8 Paleochora**

A hippy hideout well into the 1980s (see Paleochora), Paleochora's nightlife is still laid-back to a fault. A handful of relaxed – and none too noisy – music bars are scattered along the Pebble Beach waterfront, where, just out of town, there are a couple of open-air discos.

► **Map B4****9 Agia Galini**

A small resort (see Agia Galini) that has made catering to the party crowd its specialism. Things get lively by 11pm in a cluster of bars and dance clubs around the harbour, where you can

club-hop until the early hours.

► **Map G5****10 Siteia**

The nightlife is a good deal less frenzied here than at other resorts along the north coast, but many a pleasant evening can be spent wandering from bar to bar along the waterfront.

There are half a dozen good dance clubs (see Siteia).

► **Map Q4**

5

Where to Stay

Boutique Hotels



1 Mythos Suites, Rethymno

Situated in the old part of Rethymno, this smart hotel is housed in two 16th-century Venetian buildings that have been knocked into one. They surround a courtyard with a pretty pool; ground-floor rooms have verandahs adjoining the courtyard, while upper-floor rooms have wooden balconies.

► C12 Plateia Karaoli, 74100 • **Map F3** • 28310 53917 •

info@mythos-crete.gr • €€€

2 Nostos, Chania

With a name meaning "homecoming", this little, brightly painted pension offers a friendly welcome. On a traffic-free lane in the heart of the old town, it has studio rooms with gallery beds and balconies, and fine views of the harbour from the shaded roof-top terrace.

► 42-6 Zambeliou, 73113 • **Map D2** • 28210 94743 • €€€



3 Palazzo Rimondi, Rethymno

Tucked away in an arcaded courtyard behind iron gates, Palazzo Rimondi is a well-restored complex of 15th-century buildings, with walls painted in shades of

rose and ochre, vaulted roofs, carved stone and wooden panelled ceilings.

► 21 Xanthoudidou and 16 Har. Trikoui, 74100 • **Map F3** • 28310 51289 • rimondi@otenet.gr • No air conditioning • €€€€

4 Casa Delfino, Chania

This 17th-century Venetian mansion, Chania's most exclusive address, has been luxuriously restored. In a quiet alley, it has fine rooftop views and the suites have been individually designed.

► Theofanous 9, 73100 • **Map D2** • 28210 93098 • €€€€€

5 Casa Leone, Chania

The "House of the Lion" has been meticulously restored, with period details such as Venetian mirrors and antique (and reproduction) furniture. The Casa Leone also has a smart cocktail bar.

► Parodos Theotokopolou 18 • **Map D2** • 28210 76762 • No air conditioning • €€€€

6 Vecchio Hotel Apartments, Rethymno

An attractive complex, created by merging two Venetian mansions and adding a swimming pool. The hotel offers modern, well-equipped rooms and studios.

► Daliani 4, 74100 • **Map F3** • 28310 54985 • vecchio@otenet.gr • No air conditioning • €€€

7 Rethymniotiko Spiti, Rethymno

Five-centuries-old Venetian town house, which became a hotel in the mid-1980s. It has 12 twin and double rooms (all with en suite shower and WC).

► V. Kornarou 1, 74100 • **Map F3** • 28310 26250 • No air conditioning • €€

8 Porto del Colombo, Chania

This attractive old stone building stands close to the old harbour at Chania and, unlike some of its rivals, is open year round. There are 10 twin and double rooms, some of which have cosy gallery beds, with furnishings that harmonize with the building's traditional lines.

► Theofanous and Moschon, 73131 • **Map D2** • 28210 98466 • €€€

9 Villa Andromeda, Chania

Lovingly restored Neo-Classical mansion, with a lush palm garden and a large pool, elaborately painted ceilings, white marble floors, staircases and balconies. Open year round.

► 150 Eleftherios Venizelou 73133 • **Map D2** • 28210 28300 • vilandro@otenet.gr • No air conditioning • €€€€€

10 Suites Pandora, Chania

A stylish collection of two- and four-bed suites, some facing an inner courtyard, others looking out to sea. All have high ceilings, balconies and tall shuttered windows.

► Lithinou 29, 73100 • **Map D2** • 28210 43589 • www.pandorahotel.gr • No air conditioning • €€€

Luxury Resorts

1 Elounda Mare Hotel, Elounda

Undeniably the best resort hotel in Crete, the Elounda Mare is a complex of 215 suites and villas set within lush grounds. The wide variety of sports and activities include tennis and a full array of water sports, and other facilities are close by on the peninsula.

► Elounda Beach, 72053 • **Map N4** • 28410 41412 • elohotel@eloundabeach.gr • €€€€€

2 Hotel St Nicholas Bay, Ag. Nikolaos

Within walking distance of the restaurants and shops of Agios Nikolaos, this is one of Crete's finest hotels. It has three swimming pools and its own semi-private beach, with a wide choice of water sports.

► 72100 Agios Nikolaos • **Map N4** • 28410 25041 • €€€€€

3 Minos Palace, Ag. Nikolaos

A highly esteemed resort of 150 rooms and bungalows close to Agios Nikolaos town. Facilities include tennis courts, a swimming pool, water sport, and several restaurants.

► 72100 Agios Nikolaos • **Map N4** • 28410 23801 • €€€€€

4 Silva Maris, Limin Chersonisos

The Silva Maris has one of the finest marine spa centres in Greece, with a range of health and beauty

treatments. It also has a fine private beach and verdant gardens.

➤ 70014 Limin Chersonisos • **Map L3** • 28970 22850 • €€€€€

5 Candia Maris, Amudara

This stunning modern hotel combines traditional style and materials (a preponderance of stone and marble, for example) with up-to-date facilities and a beautiful pool. It also has a thalassotherapy spa and a sports centre.

➤ 71414 Gazi, Heraklion • **Map K3** • 28103 77000 • €€€€€

6 Porto di Candia, Elounda

This complex of 186 selfcatered apartments and studios (all with TV and kitchen) is set within vast grounds on the Elounda Peninsula, which provides some fine sea views. A restaurant, four pools and a supermarket complete the package.

➤ 72100 Katsikia • **Map N4** • 28410 26811 • €€€€



7 Creta Paradise, Chania

An award-winning 186-room resort on one of Crete's Blue Flag beaches, the Creta Paradise is only ten minutes away from the centre of Chania. Modern facilities include two pools,

and its bungalows have been built in an attractive Neo-Classical style.

➤ 73100 Gerani • **Map D2** • 28210 61315 • €€€€

8 Capsis Beach Hotel, Irakleio

On a private headland, this five-star resort has its own private beaches, a huge pool, a choice of bars and restaurants and even its own zoo with monkeys, peacocks, ostriches and ponies. Ideal for families, with some exclusive villas.

➤ Agia Pelagia 71000, Irakleio • **Map K3** • 2810 811112 • €€€€



9 Grecotel Creta Palace, Rethymno

Smaller than its sister hotel the Rithymna Beach, the Creta Palace is only 4 km (2 miles) from central Rethymno, with 162 rooms in its main block and 200 bungalows and villas. It has several pools and a wide range of activities for children, as well as tennis and water sports.

➤ 74100 Missiria • **Map F3** • 28310 55181 • €€€€€

10 Minos Beach Art 'Otel, Ag. Nikolaos

This medium-sized complex of bungalows with splendid views of the Gulf of Mirabello is set in tranquil, flowerfilled gardens, graced by a collection of specially commissioned sculptures. Only a stroll from the centre

of Agios Nikolaos, the hotel has its own small sandy beaches and several rocky inlets.

➤ 72100 Ag • **Map N4** • 28410 22345 • infominos@mamhotel.gr • €€€€€

Self-Catering Apartments

1 Elounda Residence, Elounda

Set in lush gardens about 20 minutes' walk from the village, this is an excellent complex, with 24-hour reception, bars, restaurant and minimarket to complement its two- to four-bed apartments. Facilities include a large saltwater pool, children's pool, tennis court and mini-golf.

➤ 72053 Elounda • **Map N4** • 28410 41823 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€

2 Casa Veneta, Chania

This Venetian mansion near the harbour has been divided into double and twin-bedded studios, and open-plan apartments sleeping up to four people on three floors, with twin-bed galleries and balconies, some with sea views.

➤ Theotokopoulou 55–7, 73131 Chania • **Map D2** • 28210 90007 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€

3 Marina Studios, Malia

A modern complex of 11 apartments and studios, just 300 m from the beach and 6 km (4 miles) from the bright lights of Chersonisos.

➤ Malia 70007 • **Map M4** • 28970 33370 • €€



4 Nostalgia Studios, Georgioupoli

An attractive small complex close to the village centre. It has a small pool and choice of studios and apartments for two to four people. All have shower, kitchenette

and balcony or patio.

➤ 73007 Georgioupoli • **Map E3** • 28250 61400 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • Closed Nov–Apr • €€€

5 Gerani Studios and Apartments, Malia

Slap in the centre of Malia, this cheap and cheerful complex has twin-bed studios with kitchenette and balcony, and larger apartments sleeping up to four.

➤ 70007 Malia • **Map M4** • 28970 31518 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • Closed Nov–Mar • €€



6 Creta Helena, Chania
Modern apartment complex in a quiet area, 20 minutes' walk from the harbour. It offers openplan apartments, each with a twin or double bedroom and a living room with sofa-bed and kitchenette. There's also a small pool.

► I. Sfakianaki 42, 73134 Chania • **Map D2** • 28210 46722 • €€€

7 Bay View Apartments, Siteia

On the fringe of Siteia and just a few paces from the beach, the Bay View has 10 apartments, most with twin beds and sofa-bed, and all with full kitchen facilities. Each room has a balcony or verandah.

► Petras, 72400 • **Map Q4** • 28430 022713 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€

8 Dionyssos Village, Siteia

This large, colourful complex offers two pools and a playground right next to the beach. Each apartment has a kitchen and TV, and sleeps three to four people. The complex also has restaurants, bars and a café.

► Analouka, 72400 • **Map Q4** • 28430 62000 • Closed Dec–Feb • €€€

9 Kastri Village, Palaiocastro

Between Palaiocastro and Kouremenos beach, the Kastri Village has 32 self-catering apartments with kitchenettes, verandahs and a pool. The beach is close by.

► 72300 Palaiokastros • **Map R4** • 28430 61100 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€



10 Anna Apartments, Paleochora

Smothered with flowers and greenery, this attractive little complex is on a quiet side street close to the beach. All apartments have one or two bedrooms, living room, kitchen and verandah. There's also a children's play area.

► Paleochora • **Map B4** • 28100 346428 • No air conditioning • No credit cards • €€€

Village Guesthouses



1 Milia Village

Set in the forested slopes of Crete's "wild west", Milia offers 13 rooms in village houses rebuilt between 1982 and 1993 in local stone and wood. The rooms are heated by

wood-burning stoves, while water comes from mountain springs.

► 73012 Milia, Vlatos • **Map B3** • 28220 51569 • No air conditioning • €€

2 Parthenagogio, Chania

A chance to live like Cretan villagers, helping with wine-making, olive picking, herding goats, basket weaving and baking. A co-operative venture, Parthenagogio was restored by villagers in the mid-1990s and now has its own taverna, serving Cretan dishes and wines from its own vineyards.

► Apokoronas • **Map D2** • 28250 22932 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • €€€

3 Aspros Potamos, Makrygialos

A settlement of 10 adobe-style cottages for lovers of the simple life, with water from the well and paraffin lamps for lighting (though bathroom lights and fridges in each house use solar energy). The lack of 21st-century gadgets is truly relaxing.

► Aspro Potamos, Makrygialos, 72055 Ierapetra • **Map P5** • 28430 51694 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • €

4 White River Cottages, Makrygialos

This group of shepherds' cottages with stone floors, low wooden ceilings and corner fireplace nooks stands in groves of pine, olive and carob trees. The sandy beach at Makrygialos is less than 2 km (1 mile) away, and there is a tiny swimming pool on site.

► Aspros Potamos, Makrygialos 72055, Ierapetra • **Map P5** • 28430 51120 • No air conditioning • €€€



5 Aphrodite, Sougia

Pretty pension in a quiet, leafy lane just off Sougia's somewhat main street. Clean, affordable rooms with blue-painted balconies, marble-topped tables and lots of flowers.

► Sougia • **Map C4** • 28230 51414 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • €€

6 Arolithos, Tylissos

A complex of stone houses with an array of traditional crafts, from pottery and icon painting to basket weaving and embroidery. Traditional music and dance performed nightly.

► Arolithos, 71500 Servili, Tylissos • **Map J4** • 28100 821050 • €€€



7 The Blue House, Loutro

Amiable guest house, with balconies overlooking the bay and the slopes of the White Mountains. Particularly handy as an overnight stop on the way to or from Agia

Roumeli and the Samaria Gorge.

► **Loutro • Map D4 • 28250 91127 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • €€**

8 Spinalonga Village, Elounda

Coastal Spinalonga Village is a group of traditional stone houses beside the Gulf of Mirabello, with views across to Spinalonga, and shops and places to eat nearby at Plaka village (a five-minute walk).

► **72053 Elounda • Map N4 • 28410 41494/6 • No air conditioning • €€€€€**

9 Koutsounari Cottages, Ierapetra

Hillside holiday village above the Libyan Sea, with a choice of restored stone cottages, with modern kitchens and bathrooms, or fully up-to-date studios. All have verandahs or tiny gardens, and there is a pool, snack bar and taverna next door.

► **72200 Ierapetra • Map N6 • 28420 61291 • Some air conditioning • €€€**

10 Diktaeon Andron, Psychro

A tiny guesthouse in Psychro village that makes a good base for a visit to the Diktian Cave or for exploring the Lasithi Plateau, high in the mountains of eastern Crete.

► **72052 Psychro, Lasithi • Map M4 • 28440 315 04 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • €**

Villas

1 Elounda Gulf Villas

Crete's most luxurious villa complex has 12 houses, each with private pool. All have washing machines and dishwashers, and marble bathrooms with whirlpool tubs. Fine views are to be had, also, across the Gulf of Mirabello.

► **72053 Elounda • Map N4 • 28410 90300 • www.eloundavillas.com • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€€**

2 Villa Dafnes, Dafnes

This stunning three-bedroom, 19th-century house in the heart of Crete's top wine region has a flower-filled courtyard, open-plan kitchen and dining room, and an eight-metre swimming pool. Price includes flights and car hire.

► **Dafnes • Map J4 • Reservations Simply Travel(00 44) 20 8541 2201 • www.simply-travel.co.uk • €€€€€**

3 Villa Iason, Maleme

Three villas, each with its own pool, share a larger pool with two apartments in a Mediterranean-style mansion. Other shared facilities include a gym, sauna, plunge pool and wine cellar. Fully serviced, with a cook on request.

► **73100 Maleme • Map C2 • Reservations Crete Travel 28250 32690 • www.crete-travel.com • €€€€€**

4 Villa Christina, Almirda

On a hilltop above Almirda beach, with a superb pool and views over Souda Bay. A double room, two twins, fully equipped kitchen and maid service. Also with a wonderful sea-facing terrace.

► **Plaka, Almirda • Map D2 • Reservations Greek Islands Club(00 44) 20 8232 9780 • www.greekislandsclub.com • No air conditioning • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€**

5 Villa Ambelia, Akrotiri

Three-bedroomed villa set among olive groves and vineyards. It has its own pool, and facilities include a laundry service and maid.

► **Kunupidianna, Akrotiri • Map D2 • UK reservations(00 44) 2920 711 334 • www.akrotirivillas.com • No air conditioning • €€€€**



6 Hamam House, Vamos

This dinky villa, once part of a Turkish pasha's villa, has a small pool and garden. It is in a delightful old village, but the bright lights of Chania are only half an hour away. Ideal

for a couple.

► **Vamos • Map E3 • Reservations www.greekislandsclub.com • (00 44) 20 8232 9780 • No air conditioning • Not available Nov–Mar • €€€€€**

7 Vamos House, Vamos

Luxury in this village of restored traditional buildings, with a private courtyard and balcony.

► **Vamos • Map E3 • 28250 22932 • €€€**

8 Villa Stratos, Kalonyktis

A country villa that is surrounded by flower and fruit-filled gardens. It has three bedrooms, a large living room with open fireplace and its own pool. The pretty village of Kalonyktis, with its minimarket and taverna, is a five-minute walk away.

► **Kalonyktis • Booking through Odeon Travel 28310 57610 • Closed Nov–Mar • No credit cards • €€€**



9 Metohi Kindelis, Chania

Two villa apartments, each with its own garden and pool, within a huge family farmhouse dating from Venetian times. It is surrounded by apricot and orange groves, and a huge lawn. Inside, are cool marble floors and modern facilities.

► **Pervolia, Chania • Map D2 • 28210 41321 • No air conditioning • No credit cards • €€€€€**

10 Avdou, Lasithi

Set in the grounds of a small organic farm where fruit trees grow on the Lasithi slopes. Twin-bed plus double room, shower, kitchen, dining room, and living room with fireplace and terrace.

► **70005 Avdu Pediados • Map M4 • 28103 00540 • www.avdou.com • €€€€**

Beach Hotels

1 Paradise Creta Panorama, Rethymno

Four outdoor pools, a heated indoor pool, six tennis courts, sauna and water sports that include scuba diving make this huge beach resort one of the best hotels in Crete for an active holiday. Accommodation is in suites or bungalows.

► *Panormo • Map F3 • 28340 51512 • Closed Dec–Feb • €€€€*

**2 Kalives Beach Hotel, Kalives**

Situated between two sandy beaches on Souda Bay, this hotel overlooks the river and has 150 rooms in two wings, each with a pool. There is an attractive riverside terrace restaurant, and a bridge leads the way to the beach.

► *7303 Kalives • Map E2 • 28250 31285 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€*

3 Aegean Palace Hotel, Platanias

Fields separate this lowrise hotel from the nearby beach. Its rooms surround a large pool (with poolside bar) and some suites have their own small pools. Other facilities include a gym, sauna, tennis court and playground.

► *73014 Kontomari, Platanias • Map C2 • 28210 62668 • €€€€*

**4 Porto Loutro Hotel, Loutro**

This very attractive hotel just above the beach at Loutro has 36 rooms (plus four self-catering studios). They are in two buildings in separate parts of this village, set among palm trees, bougainvillea and tamarisk. It is accessible only by boat.

► *73011 Loutro, Anopoli • Map D4 • 28250 091433 • No credit cards • No air conditioning • Closed Nov–Feb • €€*

5 Georgiopolis Beach Hotel

Only a minute's walk from the village centre, the hotel has three pools. Designed in Neo-classical style, the low-rise buildings are prettily painted in cream, blue and pink.

► *73007 Georgiupoli • Map E3 • 28250 61056 • Closed Oct–Mar • €€€*

6 Astir Beach Hotel, Gouves

This hotel overlooks a fine, sandy beach and has two pools, a tennis court and a range of other land and water sports, including a scuba diving centre. It also has a mini-market and a children's playground.

► *70014 Gouves • Map L3 • 28970 041141 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€*

7 Louis Creta Princess Club, Maleme

Built around a complex of lagoon-like swimming pools on the beach at Maleme Bay, the Louis Creta is a tropical-style resort with an excellent range of sports,

including tennis, football, archery, mini-golf and basketball.

► *73100 Maleme • Map C2 • 28210 62702 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€*

8 Neos Alianthos Garden Hotel, Plakias

Across the road from one of Crete's best beaches, this family-run hotel is the best in Plakias. It has a children's pool, freshwater pool and pool-bar, a supermarket and restaurant.

► *74060 Plakias • Map F4 • 28320 031280 • Closed Dec–Feb • €€€*

9 Iberostar Athina Palace, Irakleio

A large beach hotel with three outdoor pools and its own beach. Accommodation comes in a choice of two- or three-person bungalows, family bungalows sleeping two adults and two children, and four-person maisonettes with sea view.

► *71001 Agia Pelagia • Map K3 • 28410 25944 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€€*

10 Rethymno Mare Royal

Opened in 2001 at Scaleta, 11 km (7 miles) east of Rethymno, the Rethymno Mare Royal has landscaped gardens and a pool, a restaurant, three bars and its own nightclub. It also offers a wide range of water sports, including a diving school.

► *74100 Rethymno • Map F3 • 28310 71703 • Closed Nov–Mar • €€€€€*

6

Things to See

Art and Archaeological Museums



1 Irakleio Archaeological Museum

The largest museum in Crete, and well worth visiting. Its collection is currently being reorganized, modernized and expanded

(see Irakleio Archaeological Museum).



2 Chania Archaeological Museum

Housed in a historic building which was first a Venetian church then a Turkish mosque, the museum is packed with Minoan finds, Hellenistic and Roman

marble sculpture, pottery and jewellery found at archaeological sites in western Crete.

► **Map D2** • 28210 90334 • 10am–6pm Mon–Sat; 11am–6pm Sun • Adm



3 Siteia Archaeological Museum

The most important exhibits are from the palace site at Zakros, on Crete's east coast, which was uncovered in 1961. They include clay tablets inscribed with the

symbols of the Minoan Linear A script, as well as bronze tools and kitchen utensils.

► **Map Q4** • Fiskokefalou 3 • 28430 23917 • 8:30am–3pm Tue–Sun • Adm



4 Rethymno Archaeological Museum

In a converted bastion built by the Turks, the collection extends from the Stone Age to the Minoan and Hellenistic eras, with finds from archaeological sites, caves and cemeteries in the Rethymno region. Among the highlights are late Minoan burial caskets, or larnakes, and burial goods found in Minoan cemetery sites.

► **Map F3** • Cheimarras, Fortetza • 28310 54668 • 8:30am–3pm Tue–Sun • Adm

5 Byzantine Collection of Chania

The fine collection of beautiful Cretan icons is the best reason to visit this small museum next to Chania's harbour fortress. The collection spans 1,000 years of Byzantine history and sheds light on an often ignored chapter in Crete's complex history.

► **Map D2** • 82 Theotokopoulou • 28210 96046 • Noon–7pm Mon, 8:30am–7pm Tue–Fri, 8:30am–3pm Sat & Sun • Adm



6 Agios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum

A jug in the stylized shape of a female figure, found at the Bronze Age site at Korifi and known as the Goddess of Mirtos, is this museum's

proudest exhibit. Elsewhere are clay Minoan coffins decorated with paintings, good examples of Vasiliki pottery and some finely worked gold jewellery.

► **Map N4** • K. Palaeologou 74 • 28410 24943 • 8:30am–7pm Tue–Sun • Adm

7 Museum of Religious Art, Irakleio

This 15th-century Venetian church – where both El Greco and the great icon painter Michailis Damaskinos are said to have learned their skills – contains the world's best array of Cretan icons. The collection includes three superb works by Damaskinos.

► **Map K3** • Church of Agia Ekaterini, Plateia Ag. Ekaterini • 2810 288825 • 8:30am–1:30pm Mon–Sat, 5–7pm Tue, Thu, Fri • Adm

8 Ierapetra Archaeological Museum

Exhibits include huge clay storage jars (pithoi), Minoan sarcophagi made of clay (larnakes) statues, and bronze weapons and tools dating from the time of the Dorian city-states, when Ierapetra became one of the most powerful cities in eastern Crete.

► **Map N6** • 1 Kostoula Adrianou Ierapetra • 28420 28721 • 8:30am–3pm Tue–Sun • Adm



9 Archanes Collection

Finds from the Minoan cemetery discovered at Fourni, just north of Archanes village, are displayed in the village's small but rather good archaeological museum

along with relics from other nearby sites.

► **Map K4** • Kalochristianaki, Archanes • 2810 752712 • 8:30am–3pm Mon and Wed–Sun • Free

10 El Greco Museum

Copies of paintings and biographical material relating to the life of the Cretan-born artist Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, are displayed in an extensively restored Venetian building in Fodele village, which is claimed to be his birthplace.

► **Map J3** • Fodele village, just south of main coast road • 2810 521500 • Adm

Folklore Museums

1 Lychnostatis Open Air Museum of Folk Culture

Traditional Cretan ways of life that lasted for centuries only began to die out in recent decades. This lively open-air museum gives some insight into life on

the island before tourism, television and the mobile phone. Fascinating exhibits include a windmill and an old stone cottage.

► **Map L4** • Chersonisos • 28970 22021 • 9:30am–3pm
Mon–Sat • Adm

2 Historical and Folk Art Museum, Rethymno

A small museum housed in a Venetian mansion displays relics of a vanished way of life, including colourful woven artifacts, lace, silver jewellery and ceramics.

► **Map F3** • Vernardou 30 • 28310 23398 • 9am–1pm,
6–8pm Mon–Sat • Adm

3 Siteia Folklore Museum

This fascinating small museum opens a window onto eastern Crete's past with its collection of picturesque local costumes, beautifully woven and embroidered textiles, silver jewellery and antique cottage furniture, all of which was worn or used within living memory.

► **Map Q4** • 26 Kapetan Sifi, Siteia • 28430 23917 •
9:30am–2:30pm Tue–Sun, 6–8pm Tue and Thu evenings
• Adm

4 Museum of Cretan Ethnology, Vori

Excellent collection which gives real insight into the hard life of Cretan villagers in years gone by. For example, there are displays on how wild foods – from dandelions to snails – featured in their diet!

► **Map H5** • Vori • 28290 91392 • 10am–6pm daily •
Adm

5 Museum of Rural Life, Piskopiana

Wooden farming tools, an old olive press and a copper raki still are among the exhibits.

► **Map L3** • Outskirts of Limin Chersonisos • 28970
23303 • 10am–7pm daily • Adm

6 Agios Nikolaos Folklore Museum

Overlooking Agios Nikolaos's lagoon-like inner harbour, the museum houses colourful textiles and costumes, farming and fishing equipment, and household goods.

► **Map N4** • Kondilaki 2 • 28410 25093 • 10am–4pm
daily • Adm

7 Arolithos Museum of Agricultural History and Popular Art

This museum is linked with a holiday village which tries to give its guests a taste of traditional Cretan life, with craft workers who use traditional methods, a restaurant and bakery with wood-burning ovens, and live music and dancing in the evening.

► **Arolithos village, 8 km west of Irakleio on old highway**
• **Map J4** • 9am–noon, 2–5pm • Adm

8 Cretan House Folklore Museum

Traditional looms and spinning wheels, richly coloured rugs, wall hangings and embroidery can be found at this delightful place.

► **Map D2** • 46B Chalidon • 28210 90816 • 9am–3pm
6–9pm Mon–Sat • Adm

9 Azogyre Historical and Folklore Museum

Deep in the mountains of the Selinos region of Crete's far west, this tiny one-room museum in an old village house is crammed with mementoes of Crete under Turkish rule, from hookah-style tobacco pipes to daggers and costumes. Be warned: opening hours can be eccentric.

► **Map B4** • Azogyre • 28230 42209 • 9am–2pm
weekends • Adm



10 Historical and Folklore Museum of Gavalochori

This excellent small museum is housed in an old Venetian-Turkish mansion and depicts the history and culture of the village.

Highlights include local skills such as silk spinning, masonry and carpentry.

► **Map E3** • Gavalochori village • 28250 23222 •
9am–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1:30pm, 5–8pm Sun • Adm

Churches and Monasteries

1 Moni Arkadiou

Though founded in the 5th century, most of the monastic buildings here date from the 16th century. Moni Arkadiou has a special significance for Cretans. During the great revolt of 1866, the monastery – crowded with refugees as well as Cretan freedom fighters – was besieged by the Turks. Rather than surrender, the rebel defenders blew up their gunpowder stores, killing themselves and many of their enemies.

► **Map G4** • 28310 83076 • 8am–8pm daily • Adm



2 Panagia Kera

The most important Byzantine-era church in Crete, Panagia Kera, was built in the 13th and 14th centuries. The church is dedicated to the Virgin and to saints Anthony and Anna,

and is adorned with expressive murals depicting the two saints, as well as 14 scenes portraying the secret life of the Virgin Mary after Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection.

► **Map N5** • 28410 51525 • 8:30am–3pm daily • Adm



3 Moni Toplou

The Toplou monastery's forbidding exterior is deceptive, for like many Greek monasteries it was fortified against bandits during the Middle Ages. Inside, however, is a different world of serene, flower-filled courtyards and cloisters, and a church that houses one of the greatest Cretan works of religious art, the icon Lord, Thou Art Great by Ioannis Kornaros.

► **Map Q4** • 28430 61226 • 9am–1pm and 2pm–6pm daily • Adm



daily • Adm

4 Moni Agia Triada
The Monastery of the Holy Trinity stands among its own olive groves, and although its monastic community has dwindled to just a few members, its lovely old buildings are gradually being restored. Visitors are welcome, and the monks will happily sell you some of their home-grown olive oil, which is of high quality.

► **Map D2** • 28210 63310 • 8am–2pm and 5pm–7pm

5 Moni Gouverneto

At the last count only three elderly monks remained in this isolated monastery, deep in the wilds of the bleak and barren Akrotiri Peninsula. The building encloses a tranquil courtyard, in which stands a small chapel with some of the oldest frescoes in Crete.

► **Map D2** • 28210 63319 • 9am–12:30pm and 4:30–7pm daily



church and a small museum. Exhibits include lavishly ornamented vestments, church silver, censers and icons.

► **Map F5** • 28320 31246 • 9am–2pm and 4pm–7:30pm • Adm

7 Agioi Deka Church

This 13th-century Byzantine Church of the Ten Saints stands on the spot where ten Cretan Christians were martyred by the troops of the Roman Emperor Decius in AD 250. A striking icon depicting the ten saints with golden haloes is displayed in the nave.

► **Map J5** • 8am–5pm • Adm



icons are painted using age-old techniques.

► **Map C2** • 28210 91125 • 8am–noon and 3:30pm–7pm daily • Adm

9 Moni Katholikou

6 Moni Preveli
Built during the 17th century to replace a more remote monastery building, Moni Preveli's peaceful dormitories and cloisters look inward, onto an 18th-century courtyard with a 19th-century

8 Moni Chrysopygis
The Convent of the Source of Life, like so many Cretan monasteries, looks more like a castle than a religious dwelling. It is relatively new, built in 1863, and has a studio in which

In a rugged valley riddled with caves once used by hermits, the abandoned monastery of Gouverneto is a ghostly place, with crumbling buildings that seem to have grown out of the rockface.

► **Map D2** • Open access

10 Agios Nikolaos

This church has a history that reflects Chania's past. It was built by the Venetians, converted into a mosque after the Turkish conquest, and in the early 20th century converted again into a Greek Orthodox church dedicated to St Nicholas. Its minaret is a relic from the centuries of Muslim worship here.

► **Map D2** • 8am–7pm daily • Free

Traditional Crafts

1 Weaving

Traditional hand looms are still in use, made by skilled craftsmen from cypress, walnut or mulberry wood.

2 Embroidery

Rethymno was a major centre for embroidery, a skill introduced to Crete in the Byzantine era.

3 Spinning

Older village women still spin wool into yarn using a spindle and distaff – a skill that hasn't changed since the time of the Minoans.

4 Dyeing

Dyes are still made from shellfish (purple), madder root (red), walnut shells (dark brown), olive or pomegranate leaves (green), and crocus, marigold or narcissus (yellow).

5 Church Embroidery

Crete's Orthodox monks and nuns embellish sumptuous church vestments with gold, silver and silk stitching.

6 Wood Carving

Olive, cypress and mulberry yield a hard wood loved by skilled Cretan carpenters.

7 Leatherwork

Everything from shepherds' boots and mule harnesses to satchels, handbags and sheepskin garments.

8 Silversmithing

Silver jewellery and religious objects such as icon frames and crucifixes.

9 Lace

Silk kopaneli lace is made by bobbin weaving, a skill revived in Gavalochori.

10 Antique Weapons

The Cretan pallikar (warriorhero) loved highly decorated weapons. Authentic antique weapons are highly valued.

Villages

1 Kritsa

Sweeping mountain views and a reputation as one of the craft centres of eastern Crete ensures that Kritsa sees its fair share of tourism. Its main street, lined with old stone buildings, is packed with shops selling leather satchels and sandals, embroidery and brightly patterned rugs. Some 30 minutes' walk from Kritsa is the minor archaeological site of Lato, where you can see the remains of a Classical Greek city.

► **Map M5** • Lato 8:30am–2pm Tue–Sun



2 Argyroupoli

Western Crete's prettiest mountain village is tucked in the foothills of the Lefka Ori, on the site of the Hellenistic town of Lappa. The slopes of its valley setting flourish with lush greenery, watered by natural springs. Argyroupoli makes a good base for relatively easy walking in the surrounding hills.

► **Map E4**

3 Axos

About 10 km (6 miles) inland from the main north coast highway on the way to the scenic Amari Valley, Axos has striking views and an attractive Byzantine church dedicated to Agia Anna. The village is a popular stop for excursion groups, and its tavernas and souvenir shops get crowded around lunch time. On the hillside above Axos are a few scattered remnants of an ancient settlement.

► **Map H4**



4 Kournas

Kournas nestles at the foot of Mt Dafnomadara, in a fertile plain close to Crete's only freshwater lake. Its old stone houses cluster around a steep main street, and the village has two historic Byzantine-Venetian churches, dedicated to Agios Georgios and Agia Irene.

► **Map E3**

5 Topolia

This village, en route from Kastelli to Paleochora, stands amid farm terraces, fields and olive groves, in a well watered valley which leads into Kartsomatados Gorge. Its small church of Agia Paraskevi dates from the late Byzantine era.

► **Map B3**



6 Elos

Elos is one of the settlements known as the Enea Choria ("Nine Villages"), which are set among the chestnut forests of the Selloni region. At 1,200 m (3,700 ft) above sea level, it can be pleasantly cooler than the south coast beaches in summer. Surrounded by woodland, Elos has a 14th-century Byzantine chapel and a ruined Turkish aqueduct.

► **Map B3**

7 Alikianos

A ruined Venetian castle of the aristocratic Molini family (see Da Molini Castle Ruins, Alikianos) and a noted 14th-century church of Agios Ioannis (or "Ai-Kir Yanni" in local Cretan dialect) are the prime sights of Alikianos. The village is picturesque in itself, however, and surrounded by citrus groves.

► **Map C2**



8 Hamezi

Set above the Bay of Siteia, Hamezi has been inhabited since the Minoan era. Indeed, remnants of Minoan buildings can be seen on a hilltop from the present village, which is a peaceful clutter of whitewashed stone cottages, offset by colourful displays of flowers.

► **Map P5**



9 Voila

Voila is Crete's most dramatic ghost village, with lizards scuttling across its ruined walls and crumbling doorways. Voila is overlooked by the tumbledown walls of a Venetian hilltop castle and a Turkish tower, and the only building still intact is the church of Agios Giorgios. Surprisingly, two Turkish drinking fountains still provide visitors with fresh water.

► **Map Q5**

10 Ethia

It is hard to believe that this desolate hamlet was an important place during Venetian occupation, when it was the fief of the De Mezzo family. Their ruined family tower is now recognized as an important Venetian building, worthy of restoration.

► **Map Q5**

Sights in Western Crete



1 Rethymno
Rethymno is Crete's third largest town (after Irakleio and Chania) and its most attractive, with an inner harbour overlooked by a huge, brooding Venetian fortress (the Fortetsa),

streets of old-fashioned Venetian mansions, and a palm-fringed esplanade along a sandy beach. Thanks to its nearby beaches, Rethymno has become a fully fledged resort town, with holiday hotels east of the city centre, lots of shops, and plenty of good restaurants, lively bars and cafés. It also has a colourful early morning street market (see Rethymno & A Morning in Rethymno).



Market stall, Rethymno



Nerandzes Mosque, Rethymno



2 Chania
Chania, Crete's second largest city, is built around a fine natural harbour which attracted a host of settlers over the millennia, from early Minoans to Romans, Byzantines, Saracens,

Venetians and Turks. The heart of the city is the old town, a huddle of narrow streets sheltered by a ring of battlements built by the Venetians; under their rule Chania was one of Crete's most important ports. Today the old town is dominated by restaurants, cafés and bars, while outside the Venetian walls is the newer part of town. Chania has some of Crete's most spectacular scenery as backdrop, with the slopes of the Lefka Ori range (White Mountains) rising steeply a short way inland and seeming to dominate the entire southern horizon (see Chania).



Firkas Fort, Chania

3 Samaria Gorge
Taking its name from the tiny Venetian church of Santa Maria (close to the now abandoned Samaria village), this is probably the most dramatic stretch of scenery in Crete. The gorge is one of the deepest and longest in Europe, cutting its way through the Lefka Ori from the Omalos Plateau to the Libyan Sea, and narrowing to a width of only a few arm widths at its narrowest point. The gorge is within the Samaria National Park, a refuge for many rare birds, plants and mammals (see Samaria Gorge).



4 Paleochora
Paleochora stands on a peninsula between two beaches: a long sandy bay to the northwest and an even longer, but pebblier and more exposed beach, to the southeast. Close to the

centre of the village are the ruined walls of a Venetian fort, Castel Selino, which was built to guard the harbour and coast but left to crumble after the Turkish conquest. "Discovered" by backpackers in the 1970s, Paleochora is now one of Crete's quieter resorts, with a low-key nightlife and a family atmosphere.

► **Map B4**

5 Frangokastello
A small, deserted "Castle of the Franks" – actually built in 1371 by the Venetians to defend this stretch of the south coast against pirate attacks (see Frangokastello) – gives this small fishing village and resort its name. The Lion of St Mark, symbol of the Venetian Republic, still adorns the town's southern gateway. Frangokastello has a long sweep of grey sandy beach, and offers, by way of accommodation, small pensions and apartments. A handful of restaurants and cafés open up in summer, but the choice of places to eat, drink and stay is very limited in the low season.

► **Map E4**



6 Sougia
Sougia is perfect for anyone in search of peace, quiet and isolation. Tourism is very low-key, with just a scattering of small pensions and guest houses, tavernas and cafés. The town's beach

is long and pebbly, and the water is sparklingly clear, while an hour's walk away are the ruins of the ancient city-state of Lissos, including a temple to Asklepios, the god of healing, which dates from the 3rd century BC.

► **Map C4**



7 Loutro
Sheltered by a stretch of headland and dwarfed by the near-vertical slopes of the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) above it, Loutro is one of the most charming spots on Crete. Less than 30

years ago Loutro had only a few elderly inhabitants and

one taverna. Tourism has changed all that, and now dazzling white pensions and apartments sit above the tiny crescent-shaped beach. Accessible only on foot (by a precarious cliff path) or by boat from Chora Sfakion, Loutro seems unlikely to be over-run by tourism, and is ideal for a laidback holiday.

► **Map D4**



eucalyptus and plane trees.

► **Map E3**



transform into a strip of purposebuilt hotels (none of them obtrusively large), apartments, shops and restaurants. Not for those looking for authenticity, Plakias nevertheless has plenty going for it, including attractive surrounding countryside, its own long sweep of shingly sand, and lots more even prettier beaches and palm-fringed coves within walking distance.

► **Map F4**

10 Kastelli Kissamou

Usually known simply as Kastelli, Crete's westernmost town is couched in a bay between the Rodopou and Gramvoussa peninsulas. It has largely missed out on the tourism boom, although it has a handful of hotels and restaurants. There are several rarely-visited ancient and medieval sites nearby, including the ruins of Polyirinia (see Venetian Acropolis and Polyirinia), and there are reasonable – if unexceptional by Cretan standards – beaches on either side of town.

► **Map B2**

Sights in Eastern Crete

8 Georgioupoli

A modern community by Cretan standards, the town was founded little over a century ago when it was named in honour of Prince George, the then governor of Crete. More recently, it has become a resort, with hotels stretching along the sandy beach. It attracts a less raucous clientele than resorts such as Malia and Chersonisos, however, and the heart of Georgioupoli is a town square, shaded by



town takes its name from the tiny 11th century church of Agios Nikolaos (which now stands in the grounds of the Mino Palace Hotel). The Archaeological Museum (see Agios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum) displays numerous finds from nearby sites including Mochlos and Gournia.



Agios Nikolaos harbour

► **Map N4**



1 Agios Nikolaos

Agios Nikolaos has the most attractive location of any town in eastern Crete. By the Gulf of Mirabello, it is built around an inner lagoon, Voulismeni, which is surrounded by palm trees and cafés. Modern hotels and apartments dwarf the surviving older buildings, but it is still a place of considerable charm. There is a small town beach, and boats take holidaymakers to larger beaches nearby. The

2 Siteia

Siteia looks surprisingly modern but was founded in the 4th century, when a flourishing Byzantine city stood here. Its fortunes waned after the 14th century, when it was

damaged by earthquakes and sacked by corsairs. It was not until the late 19th century that Siteia became an important farming centre, surrounded by olive groves and vineyards. It has a picturesque harbour overlooked by a Venetian fortress, a Folk Museum with a collection of traditional costumes (see Siteia Folklore Museum), and an Archaeological Museum (see Siteia Archaeological Museum).



Market, Siteia

► **Map Q4**



3 Vai

The main claim to fame of the beach at Vai is in having the only wild palm grove in Europe. The palm forest apparently existed at least 2,000 years ago, so

may have been planted by early navigators from the Middle East who came to Crete. The drawbacks are that the palm trees are fenced off

and protected, and the beach becomes overrun with visitors in high season. Nevertheless, it is beautiful, especially if visited outside the busiest summer months of June, July and August.

► **Map R4**



4 Zakros Gorge

The Zakros Gorge is known locally as the Valley of the Dead because the numerous caves in its limestone walls were used as tombs in Roman times.

The gorge runs from the peaceful village of Ano ("upper") Zakros to Kato ("lower") Zakros on the sea, near an ancient Minoan palace site rediscovered in 1961. It is a beautiful and not too challenging 8-km (5-mile) hike (see Zakros Gorge).



Taverna, Kato Zakros

► **Map Q5**



5 Elounda

Elounda, on the Gulf of Mirabello, is Crete's most expensive resort area, with several exclusive villa and hotel complexes in landscaped grounds. Several of these even have private

beaches. The village itself is less upmarket, with a clutter of shops and restaurants surrounding a small fishing harbour from which boats depart daily in summer on trips to Spinalonga, the Venetian fortress-island and former leper colony not far offshore.

► **Map N4**

6 Makrygialos

Makrygialos is the most popular holiday resort on the southeast coast, with a long, straggling array of small pensions, hotels and tavernas stretching along a crescent of rather windswept, gently shelving sand and pebble beach, which is the best in this part of the island.

► **Map P5**



7 Spinalonga

The fortifications covering this small, rocky island in the Gulf of Mirabello were built by the Venetians in 1579 to control the approaches to this superb natural harbour. Superior sea

power allowed Venice to hang onto Spinalonga for half a century after the fall of the rest of Crete to the Turks, and it was surrendered only in 1715. Used as a leper colony in the first half of the 20th century, its buildings are now very dilapidated, but the grim walls may still give the visitor an eerie thrill.

► **Map N4**



8 Ierapetra

Ierapetra is the largest town on the southeast coast. Its buildings are rather dull, but it has a good, long beach of grey sand and the distinction of receiving more hours of sunshine per year

than anywhere else in Europe. Huge crops of tomatoes are raised all year round in the surrounding farmlands. Ierapetra became an important Dorian Greek settlement as early as the 8th century BC, and by the 2nd century BC it was the largest city-state on the island after defeating its Eteocretan neighbours, Praisos and Itanos. Under the Romans it was an important seaport; the Venetians built a fortress to defend the harbour.

► **Map N6**

9 Lato

Modern-day Agios Nikolaos was once no more than the seaport annex of this Dorian Greek city which flourished between the 7th and 3rd centuries BC. Built around two neighbouring hills, 8 km (5 miles) west of Agios Nikolaos, Lato is the best preserved Dorian site in Crete, with walls built of massive stone blocks. There are fine views over the Gulf of Mirabello from its agora (marketplace) in a saddle between the twin summits.

► **Map M4 • 8:30am–3pm Tue–Sun • Adm**

10 Mochlos

Mochlos, 32 km (20 miles) east of Agios Nikolaos on the coast road, is a tiny fishing hamlet with a handful of tavernas. Just offshore is the island of Mochlos, which in ancient times was connected to the mainland by an isthmus. This has been eroded by earthquakes and waves. On the island are the remains of Minoan houses and a Minoan harbour, much of which is now under water. Seal quartz, superb gold jewellery and vases carved from quartz, alabaster and black steatite have been discovered in rock tombs on the island and are displayed in the Agios Nikolaos and Siteia archaeological museums.

► **Map P4**

Sights in Central Crete

1 Ancient Knosos

Knosos was pinpointed as an important archaeological site by the great Heinrich Schliemann and unearthed by British archaeologist Arthur Evans less than 100 years ago. The columns, courtyards and coloured frescoes of this ancient Minoan palace still have the power to amaze. Knosos was lost to history after the cataclysmic volcanic eruption that destroyed the Minoan civilization, but the site is now one of the most impressive relics of the vanished world of the Minoans (see Ancient Knosos).



2 Phaestos

This labyrinth of ruins dating from around 1600 BC includes a Minoan courtyard and theatre with tiers of stone seats, a monumental stairway, peristyle hall and a vast central courtyard. The

still undeciphered Phaestos Disc, which was discovered here, is on display in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum (see Irakleio Archaeological Museum). Phaestos was destroyed around 1450 BC by the cataclysm that also laid low the rest of Crete's Minoan palaces. Not usually as crowded as the more famous Knossos, the site at Phaestos has an impressive location on a hillside above fertile farmland (see Phaestos).



3 Gortys

Toppled Roman columns, a ruined Byzantine basilica, post-Minoan fortifications, and an agora, acropolis and remains of temples to Athena and Apollo all hint at the past

glories of this large and little-visited archaeological site close to Crete's south coast. First settled in Minoan times, it became one of the most important cities of Doric Crete. It later allied itself with the Romans to become an important provincial capital, and was one of Crete's most prosperous cities until it was sacked by Arab invaders during the anarchic years of the 8th century AD (see Gortys).



4 Irakleio

The modern capital of Crete was badly damaged in World War II, and few of its old Venetian buildings survived the reconstruction of the city. However, its Venetian fortress, harbour, arsenal and city walls are still impressive. For a morning's itinerary see pages 82–3. The city's main attraction is the Irakleio Archaeological Museum (see Irakleio).



Café, Irakleio market

5 Diktian Cave

According to ancient Greek myths, this mossy cavern, filled with strange limestone formations, was the birthplace of the greatest Olympian god, Zeus. Rhea, Zeus's mother, supposedly hid the young godling from his father, Kronos, here. Bronze figurines and Minoan double axes found in the cave are on show in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum. The site is also often referred to as the Idaian Cave.

► **Map L5**



6 Lasithi

The so-called "Plain of Windmills" is a high plain of fertile farmland surrounded by bare grey limestone hills. Its nickname is misleading, though. Only a few rusting metal derricks remain of the

famed white-sailed windmills that once dotted the plateau in their hundreds. However, Lasithi is still worth

a visit for the spectacular drive through the mountains and the glimpses it offers of a traditional way of life.

► **Map M4**



7 Mt Ida

At 2,456 m (8,055 ft), Mt Ida, which is also known as Mt Ida and Mt Psiloritis, is Crete's highest mountain. Only fit, experienced and well-equipped mountain walkers should try the

eight-hour hike to its summit and back. However, it is possible to drive as far as the Nida Plateau, 1,400 m (4,600 ft) above sea level, from which there are spectacular views.

► **Map G-H4**

8 Kazantzakis Museum

Cretan author Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957) is best known outside Greece for the novel *Alexis Zorba*, which is set in Crete during the early 20th century. The book was filmed in 1964 as *Zorba the Greek*, starring Anthony Quinn in the title role. Kazantzakis' outspoken humanism led the Orthodox church to regard him as a heretic. The author was born in Mirtia, and a small museum in the village (in the Kazantzakis family home) is crammed with his manuscripts and diaries, film posters, photos and other memorabilia.

► **Map K4 • Mirtia village square, signposted • 9am–1pm, 4–8pm; Closed Thu • Adm**

9 Agia Triada

Excavated by Italian archaeologists at the beginning of the 20th century, Agia Triada is smaller than other Minoan sites such as Knossos and Phaestos and was probably an aristocratic villa or a royal summer palace. Some of the finest Minoan pottery, including three carved stone vases, was discovered here and is displayed in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum. Agia Triada is only 3 km (2 miles) west of Phaestos, so can easily be visited on the same day. Because Agia Triada receives fewer visitors than the larger sites, you can explore its honeycomb of stone corridors, stairs and courtyards at your own pace.

► **Map G5 • 8:30am–3pm • Adm**

10 Boutari Winery and Audio-Visual Show

At the Fantaxometochi Winery, south of Knossos near Archanes village, one of Greece's leading winemakers has opened Crete's newest purpose-built visitor attraction. A state-of-the-art audio-visual show celebrates the island – its landscapes, history and traditional way of life. The show also highlights the vineyards and grape varieties that produce some of the Boutari family's award-winning wines. You can sample and buy Boutari red and white wines at the winery shop.

► **Map K4 • 9am–6pm Mon–Sat; Closed Nov–Mar • Adm**

7

History and Culture

Famous Cretans

1 Zeus
Paramount among the Greek gods, Zeus was said to have been born and raised in caves (see The Birth of Zeus). His mother sheltered him from his child-devouring father, the Titan Kronos, whom Zeus eventually slew, giving rise to a new dynasty of gods.

2 King Minos
Minos, King of Crete and both patron and tormentor of the ingenious Daedalus, appears in the Greek myths as a tyrant. In fact, the legendary Minos is probably a composite of many Minoan kings, whose power and wealth were remembered long after their civilization fell.

3 Nicephoros Phokas
The Byzantine general Nicephoros Phokas reconquered Crete from the Saracens in 961. Laying siege to their capital at Khandak (Irakleio), he demoralized the garrison by firing the heads of their captured comrades over the walls of the city.

4 Michael Damaskinos
Michailis Damaskinos (circa 1530–91) is the best known of the Cretan School icon painters. Some of his most important works are exhibited in the Museum of Religious Art in Irakleio (see Museum of Religious Art).

5 El Greco
Born in the twilight years of Venetian rule in Crete, Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614) studied the icon painters of the Cretan School; their influence can be seen in the elongated features of his subjects and his vivid use of colour. He trained under Titian in Italy, then moved to Toledo, where he acquired his Spanish nickname of El Greco: “the Greek”.

6 Vinzentzos Kornaros
This 16th-century poet (died 1677) was a contemporary of El Greco and Damaskinos and is remembered for his life’s work, the *Erotokritos*, post-Byzantine Greece’s greatest work of epic literature.

7 Nikos Kazantzakis
Born in Irakleio, Kazantzakis (1883–1957) is best known for his novel *Alexis Zorbas*, translated into English and filmed as *Zorba the Greek*. He was excommunicated by the Orthodox Church for his humanist views, and his self-penned epitaph reads: “I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free.”

8 Eleftherios Venizelos
Born at Mournies near Chania, Venizelos (1864–1936) made his reputation in the 1889 and 1896 uprisings. He led the campaign for union with Greece, and went on to become the Greek premier, dominating the nation’s politics until the 1930s. He then became involved in a failed republican coup d’état and was forced to flee the country, dying in exile in Paris.

9 Ioannis Daskalogiannis
Ioannis Daskalogiannis (died 1770) raised the clans of the mountainous and inaccessible Sfakia region in the first major rebellion against Turkey in 1770. The uprising failed, and when Daskalogiannis attempted to negotiate

a surrender at Frangokastello he was seized, tortured and skinned alive – a not uncommon penalty for rebels against the sultan.

10 Chatzimichalis Dalianis
Dalianis garrisoned the fort at Frangokastello with only 385 men during the nationwide uprising in 1821. On the mainland, the rebellion succeeded, giving birth to the modern Greek state, but in Crete it failed. Dalianis and his men, overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Turks, were massacred in a valiant final stand.

Myths and Legends

1 The Birth of Zeus
Zeus was the sixth child of the Titan Kronos, who had devoured his other children to prevent them from overthrowing him as he had overthrown his own father, Uranus, ruler of the old gods. Born in the Diktian Cave in Crete, Zeus was hidden by his mother Rhea and raised in the Idaian Cave on Mount Idi. Zeus eventually poisoned Kronos, making him regurgitate his siblings, who overthrew the Titans to become the new gods and goddesses.

2 Zeus and Europa
Though married to the goddess Hera, Zeus took many mortal lovers, one of whom was the princess Europa, daughter of the King of Phoenicia. Taking the form of a white bull, Zeus carried Europa off to Crete, where he took her as his wife.

3 The Minotaur and the Labyrinth
In the myth of King Minos (one of the sons of Zeus and Europa), his queen Pasiphae bore a child, half bull and half man, after coupling with the sacred bull of Zeus. Minos imprisoned this monster, the Minotaur, in a tortuous maze, the subterranean labyrinth.

4 Theseus and Ariadne
Minos demanded tribute of youths and maidens from the Athenians after defeating them in war. The victims were given to the Minotaur, but Theseus, prince of Athens, slew the Minotaur and escaped the labyrinth with the help of Minos’s daughter Ariadne, who gave him a ball of thread to retrace his steps.

5 Talos the Bronze Giant
According to myth, Zeus created the bronze giant to defend Crete. It patrolled the coasts, hurling huge boulders to sink vessels that came too close. Talos was finally slain by Jason, with the aid of the sorceress Medea, who pointed out the giant’s only weak spot, a vein near its ankle.

6 Daedalus and Ikarus
Daedalus and his son, Ikarus, made wings of feathers held together with beeswax in order to escape imprisonment at the hands of King Minos – punishment for helping Theseus slay the Minotaur. Ikarus flew too high and the sun’s heat melted the wax, causing him to plummet into the sea, but Daedalus reached safety in Sicily.

7 Hercules and the Bull of Crete

The demigod Hercules, son of Zeus and the mortal woman Alkmene, was set 12 tasks by King Eurystheus of Argos, one of which was to capture and tame the untameable bull of Crete.

8 Nymphs of Dragolaki

The cave known as the Dragolaki or "Dragon's Lair", just outside the Sfakia mountain village of Agios Ioannis, is said to be haunted by Nereids, watery nymphs who were daughters of the god Nereus.

9 The Immortal Plane Tree at Gortys

Zeus ravished Europa beneath this huge plane tree near the Roman ruins of Gortys. As a result, the tree is said never to shed its leaves, even in winter.

10 The Drossoulites of Frangokastello

Phantoms are said to emerge on 17 May every year from the sea mists and ride into the deserted little fortress at Frangokastello (see Frangokastello). They are the ghosts of Chatzimichalis Dalianis (see Chatzimichalis Dalianis) and his men, massacred by the Turks here in 1821.

Moments in History

1 1750 BC: Golden Age of Minoan Culture

Crete is the centre of the Minoan civilization, which is marked by the building of Knosos and other palaces. Mycenaeans take over Knosos in 1450 BCE.

2 Roman Conquest

The first Roman invasion of Crete in 71 BC is repulsed by the Dorian Greeks, but a second attack in 69 BC succeeds. Some Cretan cities side with the invaders, and by 67 BC Crete is firmly in Roman hands.

3 Byzantine Reconquest

The Byzantine Empire loses Crete to Arab invaders in AD 824. The Emperor Nikiforos Fokas reconquers the island in 961.

4 Venetian Rule

Crete falls into Venetian hands after 1204, when the Fourth Crusade goes awry and the Byzantine Emperor is deposed by an army of Frankish crusaders in alliance with Venice. Cretans rebel against the Venetians, but without success.

5 The Turks

Chania and Rethymno quickly fall to an attack by Turks in 1645. Venetian seapower enables the Venetian capital of Candia (modern Irakleio) to resist a 21-year siege, but Venice finally surrenders in 1669. The Cretans rise too against the Turks. The first major rebellion begins in 1770 in mountainous Sfakia and is led by Ioannis Daskalogiannis. It ends badly, however, with Sfakia conquered.

6 War of Independence

In 1821 a nationwide rising in mainland Greece flares into a full-scale and eventually successful War of Independence. In Crete, Chatzimichalis Dalianis and fewer than 400 rebels raise the Greek banner at

Frangokastello, where they are besieged and slaughtered. Crete remains under the Turkish yoke.

7 1866: Another Rebellion Against Turks

Undaunted by these heroic failures, Crete rises again in 1866, with a self-appointed Cretan Assembly declaring independence and union with Greece. The Turks bring in Egyptian troops to quell the rebels, but in Europe there is growing sympathy for the Cretan cause.

8 Great Powers Intervene

Several risings in the last decades of the 19th century culminate in the landing of Greek troops in 1897 and international intervention.

9 Union with Greece

In 1905 Eleftherios Venizelos – a minister in Prince George's governorship of Crete – calls for a nationalist revolution and in 1908 the Cretan Assembly declares union (enosis) with Greece.

10 Occupation and Liberation in World War II

German forces drive the Allies out of Crete in May 1941, but Cretan guerrillas continue to resist. Most German troops flee Greece in autumn 1944 as Allied troops land, but the garrison at Chania holds out until the end of the war in May 1945.

Ancient Sites

1 Knosos

Just outside Irakleio, Knosos is by far the most striking of the ancient Minoan palace ruins on Crete. Dating back more than 3,500 years, it was destroyed, probably by a volcanic eruption, around 1450 BC and not rediscovered until the late 19th century (see Ancient Knosos).



2 Phaestos

The ruins of the Minoan palace at Phaestos, on a hilltop by the south coast of Crete, are second only to those at Knosos. A maze of walls and courtyards marks the site of the Second Palace at Phaestos, built around 1600 BC. Hieroglyphics on the clay Phaestos Disc still puzzle scientists (see Phaestos).



3 Gortys

The ruined city of Gortys, with basilica and remnants of a Roman provincial governor's palace, dates from the early Christian era. The site extends over a wide area, and is usually uncrowded, so it can be explored at leisure (see Gortys).

4 Gournia

The well-preserved Minoan town of Gournia, a maze of roofless stone walls, makes an interesting contrast with the better-known Minoan palaces. This was a working community, and archaeologists discovered

workshops used by potters, smiths and carpenters alongside tiny houses surrounding a small palace (see Gournia).

5 Agia Triada

A treasury of Minoan relics, including tablets inscribed with the still undeciphered Minoan Linear A script, has been discovered on this site of an L-shaped Minoan villa, built about 1700 BC. The site was later occupied by Mycenaean settlers, who built a megaron (chief's hall) and a village with a unique row of porticoed shops.

► 3 km (2 miles) west of Phaestos • **Map H5** • 28920 91360 • 8:30am–7pm daily • Adm



6 Malia

East of the busy summer holiday resort of Malia is an archaeological site of the same name. The Minoan double-axe symbol, or labrys, is carved into two pillars of a small shrine. Excavations are still going on near the palace site.

► 3 km (2 miles) east of Malia • **Map M4** • 28970 31597 • 8:30am–7pm Tue–Sun • Adm



7 Zakros

The fourth largest of Crete's Minoan palaces, Zakros was rediscovered in 1961 by Cretan archaeologist Nikolaos Platon. The site had not been plundered, and finds included a stunning

rock crystal jug, now in the Irakleio Archaeological Museum. Remains of the palace and a cistern can be seen.

► Kato Zakros • **Map R5** • 28430 93338 • 8:30am–7pm Tue–Sun • Adm

8 Praisos

This scenic site – with only the remnants of a temple, house foundations and a city wall to be seen – was the last enclave of the Eteocretan ("true Cretan") descendants of the Minoans. It survived until the 2nd century BC, when it was sacked by Dorians.

► By Nea Praisos village • **Map Q5** • Unenclosed • Free

9 Itanos

The remains of a Hellenistic wall, foundations of two early Christian basilicas, and toppled walls and columns are the only indications that this was once an important city. It flourished until early medieval times, when it was destroyed by Saracen raiders.

► 2 km (1 mile) north of Vai • **Map R4** • Unenclosed • Free

10 Levin

Ancient Levin, on a hilltop just outside the modern village of Lendas, is now no more than a scattering of

ruined walls and pillars around a stone arch. The site was a sanctuary dedicated to Asklepios, the god of healing. From the 3rd century BC to the Christian era it was an important place of pilgrimage.

► North of Lendas • **Map J6** • Unenclosed • Free

Top 10 Caves

1 Sfendoni

Crete's most spectacular cave, crammed with strange rock formations deep beneath the Idi range.

2 Diktian Cave (Diktaion Antron)

Said to be the birthplace of Zeus, this cave above the Lasithi Plateau contains an artificial lake.

3 Idaion Cave

This enormous cavern on the slopes of Mount Idi was Zeus's childhood hideout.

4 Kamares

This cave on Mount Idi's southern face lends its name to the sophisticated Minoan pottery discovered here.

5 Skotino

This is one of Crete's largest caves. It was first dedicated to virgin goddess Britomartis and later became a sanctuary to Artemis.

6 Inatos

The goddess Ilithia, daughter of Zeus and Hera, was worshipped in this grotto, which delves into the sea-cliff above Tsoutsouros.

7 Ilithia

Archaic stone figures of pregnant women have been found in this cave, birthplace of the goddess Ilithia.

8 Profitis Ilias

Like the Diktian Cave, this cave near Arkalochori is also claimed as birthplace of Zeus.

9 Melidoni

This cave was said to be the lair of Talos, the bronze giant created by Zeus.

10 Cave of the Holy Fathers

This gloomy cave in the remote Sellino highlands is now a Greek Orthodox shrine.

Venetian and Turkish Castles



1 Rethymno
The massive fortress that dominates Rethymno's harbour was built by the Venetians with sloping walls to better deflect the Ottoman Empire's gigantic cannon. But it proved no match for the military ingenuity of the Turks, and fell after a short siege. Ironically, it became a far more successful stronghold for the Turkish Ottomans (see Rethymno).



Frangokastello).

2 Frangokastello
The Venetians built this romantic coastal fortress to defend the south coast from Saracen pirates. In 1821 it was occupied by a small force of Cretan rebels, holding out against a vastly greater Turkish army. The rebels were defeated of course, but, according to legend, once a year their ghosts appear from the sea to reclaim the ruined castle (see The Drossoulites of Frangokastello &



Frangokastello

► **Map E4**



3 Spinalonga
A formidable island fortress built in 1579 to command the entrance to the Gulf of Mirabello. Venice managed to hang on to it even after the surrender of Candia (Irakleio) in 1669, and gave it up only by treaty in 1715. After Turkish withdrawal, it was used for a time as a leper colony (see Spinalonga).

4 Chania

The Venetians lost Chania to their arch-rivals, the Genoese, in 1263. They regained it 22 years later, and set about making the town impregnable, starting with walls around the hill above the harbour in the district still

known as Kastelli (the castle). Further walls followed, but though they may have deterred occasional pirate raids, they proved ineffective when the Turks assailed the city in 1645.

► **Map D2**

5 Paleochora

Kastel Selinou, as Paleochora was first known, was built in 1279 to guard the southwest against pirates. The great Turkish corsair Barbarossa destroyed it in 1539. The Turks saw no need to rebuild it, and it has remained an elegant ruin ever since.

► **Map B4**

6 Venetian Acropolis and Polyrinia

On a hilltop above Paleokastro, a Venetian keep shares the peak with the ruins of the Hellenistic city of Polyrinia, which thrived until the Saracen invasion of the 9th century. Stone from Hellenistic buildings, already 1,000 years old when the Venetians arrived, seems to have been incorporated into the castle walls.

► **Map B2**



7 Aptaera

Climb the bastions of the Aptaera Fort, on a hilltop near the ruins of Byzantine Aptaera for sweeping views. Below, across the coastal highway, is the grim Itziedin Fort, now a prison and

closed to visitors.

► **Map D2**

8 Da Molini Castle Ruins, Alikianos

Though much overgrown, the dilapidated walls standing among orange and lemon trees are still impressive. The castle was the scene of a famous massacre, when the Cretan rebel leader Georgios Kandanoleon was betrayed by Francesco Molini during his wedding to Molini's daughter.

► **Map C2**



9 Venetian Fortress, Siteia

Siteia's restored Venetian fort is used as an open-air theatre for concerts and plays in summer. The fortress is all that remains of the city's once substantial ring of battlements which resisted a three-year siege by the Turks in 1648–51.

► **Map Q4**

10 Venetian Tower, Finikas, Loutro

The lonely tower standing on a headland between Loutro and the bay of Finix, is yet another Venetian relic. Nearby are a few scattered blocks, the remains of a

Byzantine church and also a Hellenistic town, the latter an important seaport when the Romans ruled Crete.

► **Map D4**

A Morning in Irakleio

1 Porta Kenouria

The most appropriate place to start exploring Irakleio's Venetian heritage is this ornate archway through the city's mighty walls, built in the mid-16th century by the Italian military engineer Michele Sanmichele. At this point, the walls are some 40 m (130 ft) thick, so it is not surprising that they withstood 16th-century Ottoman artillery and everything else thrown at them.

2 Pumphouse and Fountain

Walk through the portal and along Evans, named after the excavator of ancient Knosos, to Plateia Kornarou, named after the writer of the Cretan epic poem the Erotokritos. In the middle of this square stands a pretty, six-sided stone building, a café set within a pumphouse built by the Turks. Stop here, if you like, for a coffee in the shade of plane trees. Beside the café is the Venetian Bembo Fountain – note the broken, decapitated marble torso of a Roman statue built into its stonework.



3 Market

Leave Plateia Kornarou north of the fountain, along the market street Odos 1866, among stalls selling fresh fruit, olives, dried fruit and nuts, and less familiar produce such as buckets of

live snails. Midway along 1866, turn left and walk along to Plateia Ekaterinis, where the main landmark is the pompous 19th-century cathedral.



4 Agia Ekaterini

At the foot of the square, and more interesting than the cathedral, is this church which in the 16th century was one of the great schools of Cretan icon painting. Today it houses the

world's best collection of Cretan icons.

► 8:30am–1:30pm Mon–Sat, & 5–7pm Tue, Thu, Fri • Adm

5 Plateia Venizelou

Leave Plateia Ekaterinis by its northwest corner, and walk east to Plateia Nikoforou Foka, then left to Plateia Venizelou. The Morosini fountain stands in the middle of the square, with two stone lions standing sentinel.

6 San Marco and the Loggia

On the southeast side of the square, the former Venetian Cathedral of San Marco, dedicated to Venice's patron saint, became a mosque and is now an exhibition centre and conference hall. Leave the square by 25 Augustou and walk past the Loggia. If this Venetian

town hall looks suspiciously modern, blame restoration after earthquake and bomb damage.

7 Agios Titos

Turn right immediately after the Loggia to find Agios Titos (St Titus). Originally Byzantine, the church was rebuilt by the Venetians, turned into a mosque by the Turks and reclaimed by the Orthodox church in 1925. Inside, a reliquary contains the skull of St Titus.

► 9am–5pm daily • Free

8 Historical Museum

Returning to 25 Augustou, turn left onto Theotokopoulou, then left onto Gazi, which leads to the Historical Museum of Crete. The basement contains some interesting Venetian stonework, Turkish and Byzantine remnants and the only El Greco painting left in Crete.

► 9am–5pm Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri; 9am–2pm Tue & Sat • Adm



9 Venetian Fortress

Built in 1523–40 to guard the harbour approaches, the massive Rocca al Mare, as it was known to the Venetians, served its purpose well. Piles of cannonballs in the inner

chambers seem to await another assault.

► 8:30am–3pm Tue–Sat, 10am–3pm Sun • Adm



10 Venetian Arsenal (Arsenali)

On your way back from the fortress, you will see a series of high stone vaults built into the wall behind the harbour. These were the Arsenali or shipyards where the great

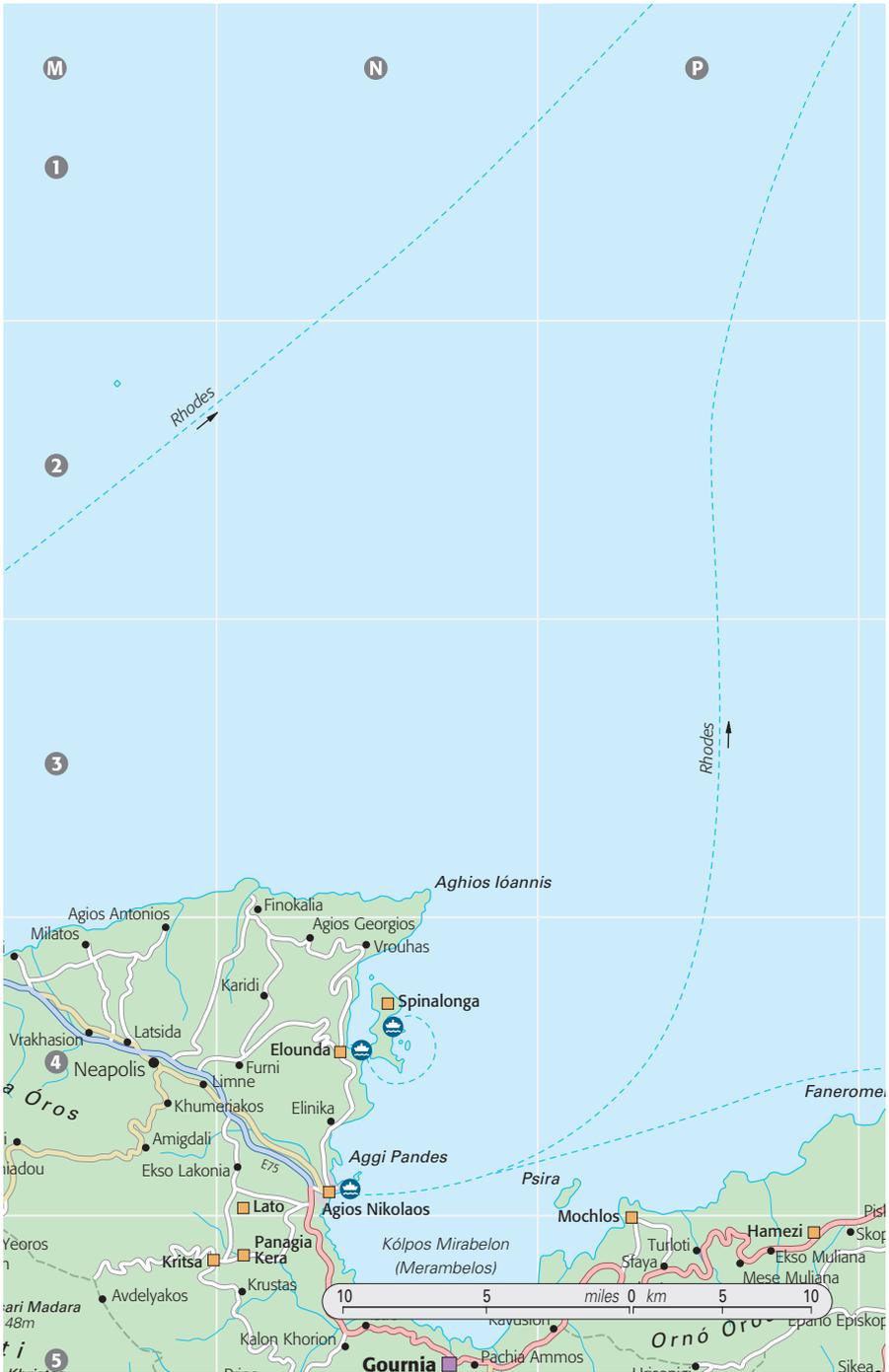
galleys were built that gave Venice its control of the sea.

8

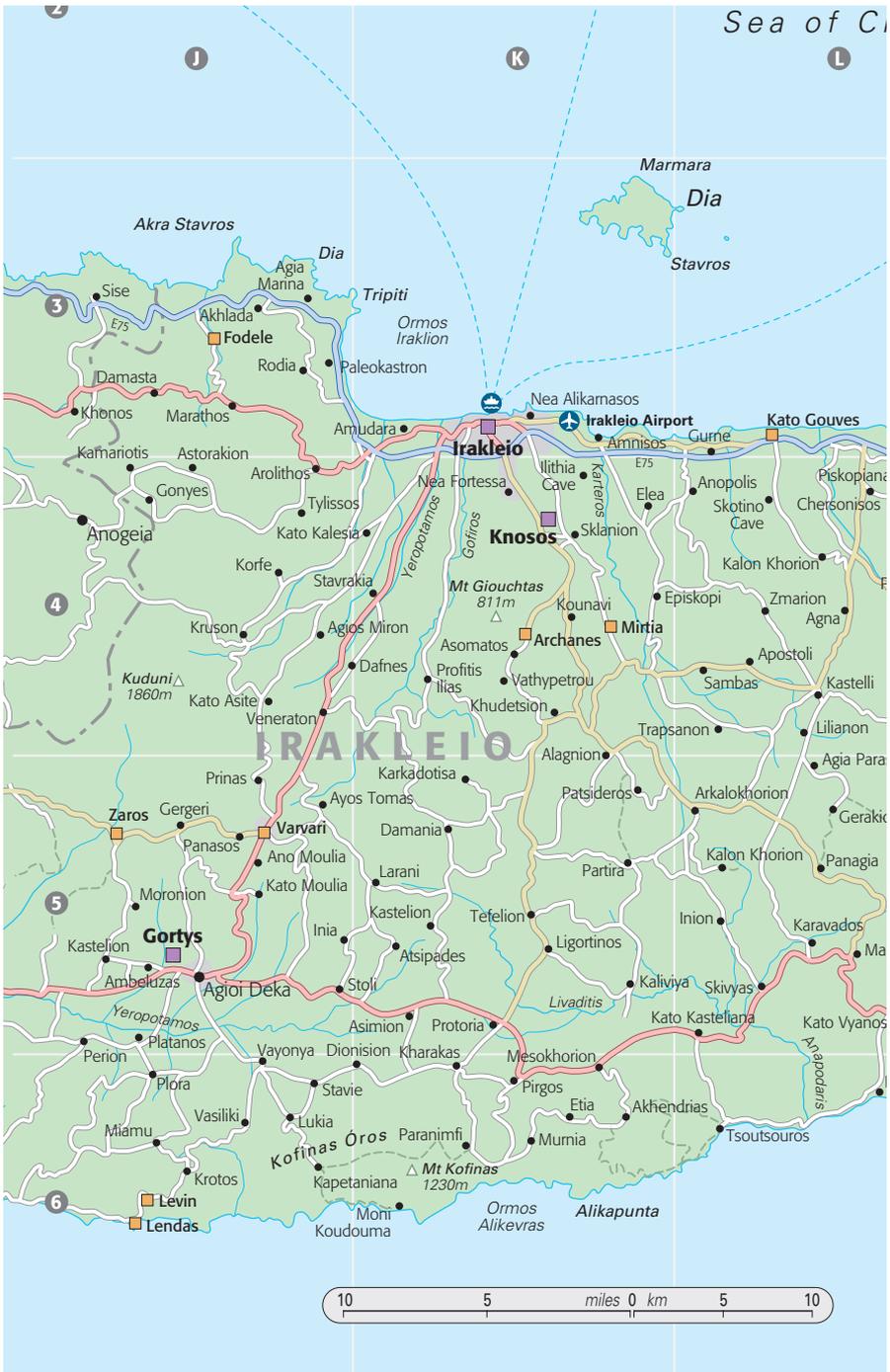
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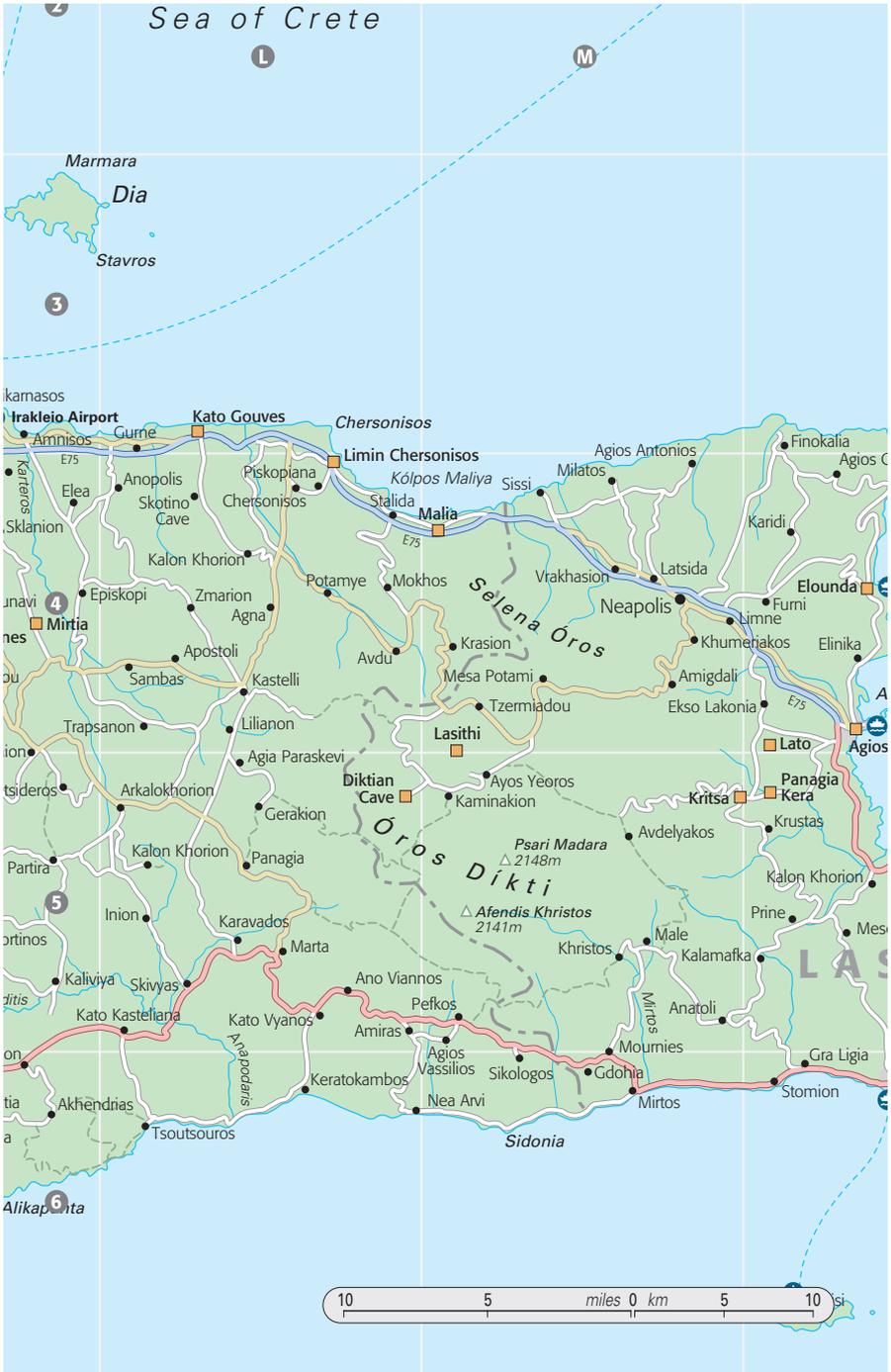






























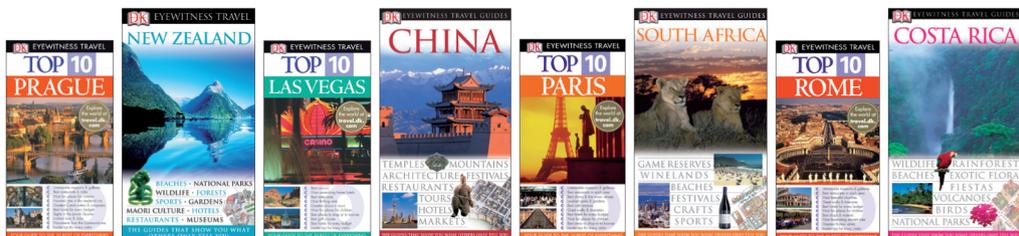
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