

Greek Islands

Crete (Chapter)

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Coverage includes: Central Crete, Iraklio, Cretaquarium, Knossos, Arhanes, Zaros, Matala, Rethymno, Moni Arkadiou, Anogia, Mt Psiloritis, Spili, Plakias & around, Beaches Between Plakias & Agia Galini, Agia Galini, Western Crete, Hania & around, Samaria Gorge, Hora Sfakion & around, Frangokastello, Anopoli & Inner Sfakia, Sougia, Paleohora, Elafonisi, Gavdos Island, Kissamos-Kastelli & around, Eastern Crete, Lasithi Plateau, Agios Nikolaos & around, Mohlos, Sitia & around, Kato Zakros & Ancient Zakros, and Ierapetra & around.

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Crete

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Why Go?

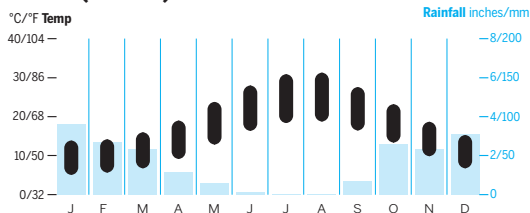
Crete (Κρήτη) is in many respects the culmination of the Greek experience. Nature here has been as prolific as Picaso in his prime, creating a dramatic quilt of big-shouldered mountains, stunning beaches and undulating hillsides blanketed in olive groves, vineyards and wildflowers. There are deep chiselled gorges, including Europe's longest, and crystal-clear lagoons and palm-tree-lined beaches that conjure up the Caribbean.

Crete's natural beauty is equalled only by the richness of a history that spans millennia. The Palace of Knossos is but one of many vestiges of the mysterious Minoan civilisation. Venetian fortresses, Turkish mosques and Byzantine churches, meanwhile, bring history alive all over the island, but nowhere more so than in charismatic Hania and Rethymno.

Ultimately, though, it's humans – not stones – that create the most vivid memories. Crete's hospitable and spirited people uphold their unique culture and customs, and traditions remain a dynamic part of the island's soul.

When to Go

Crete (Iraklio)



Apr A painters' palette of wildflowers blankets the island as locals prepare for Easter.

Jun Hit the beaches before they get crowded and rejoice in the bounty of local produce.

Oct Warm seas, blue skies and thinning crowds as the grape harvest gets under way.

History

Although inhabited since neolithic times (7000–3000 BC), Crete is most famous for being the cradle of Europe's first advanced civilisation, the Minoans. Traces of this still enigmatic society were only uncovered in the early 20th century, when British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans discovered the palace at Knossos and named the civilisation after its legendary ruler, the mythical King Minos.

Minoans migrated to Crete in the 3rd millennium BC. Their extraordinary artistic, architectural and cultural achievements culminated in the construction of huge palace complexes at Knossos, Phaestos, Malia and Zakros, all of which were levelled by an earthquake around 1700 BC. Undeterred, the Minoans built bigger and better ones over the ruins, while settling more widely across Crete. Around 1450 BC, when the Minoan civilisation was in the ascendant, the palaces were mysteriously destroyed again, possibly by a tsunami triggered by a volcanic eruption on Santorini (Thira). Knossos, the only palace saved, finally burned down around 1400 BC.

Archaeological evidence shows that the Minoans lingered on for a few centuries in small, isolated settlements before disappearing as mysteriously as they had come. They were followed by the Mycenaeans and the Dorians (around 1100 BC). By the 5th century BC, Crete was divided into city-states but did not benefit from the cultural glories of mainland Greece; in fact, it was bypassed by Persian invaders and the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great.

By 67 BC Crete had become the Roman province of Cyrenaica, with Gortyna its capital. After the Roman empire's division in AD 395, Crete fell under the jurisdiction of Greek-speaking Constantinople – the emerging Byzantine Empire. Things went more or less fine until AD 824, when Arabs appropriated the island.

In AD 961, Byzantine general and ill-fated emperor Nikiforos Fokas (AD 912–69) won Crete back with 50,000 soldiers taking the island following a nine-month siege of Iraklio (then called El Khandak by the Arabs). Crete flourished under Byzantine rule, but with the infamous Fourth Crusade of 1204 – when the Christian countries of the Latin West targeted Byzantium instead of Muslim-controlled Jerusalem – the maritime power of Venice received Crete as part of its 'payment' for supplying the Crusaders' fleet.

Much of Crete's most impressive surviving architecture dates from this period, which lasted until 1669 when Iraklio (then called Candia) became the last domino to fall after a 21-year Ottoman siege. Turkish rule brought new administrative organisation, Islamic culture and Muslim settlers. Cretan resistance was strongest in the mountain strongholds, such as rugged Skafia in the southwest where the dashing Ioannis Daskalogiannis led the first notable rebellion in 1770. This and subsequent revolts were put down brutally, and it was only with the Ottoman Empire's disintegration in the late 19th century that Europe's great powers expedited Crete's sovereign aspirations.

Thus in 1898, with Russian and French consent, Crete became a British protectorate. However, the banner under which future Greek prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos and other Cretan rebels were fighting was *Enosis i Thanatos* (Unity or Death) – unity with Greece, not mere independence from Turkey. Yet it would take the Greek army's successes in the Balkan Wars (1912–13) to turn Crete's de facto inclusion in the country into reality, with the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest.

Crete suffered tremendously during WWII. Hitler wanted the strategically placed island as an air base, and on 20 May 1941 a huge flock of German parachutists soon overwhelmed the Cretan defenders. The Battle of Crete, as it would become known, raged for 10 days between German and Allied troops from Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Greece. For two whole days the battle hung in the balance until the Germans captured Maleme Airfield, near Hania. The Allied forces fought a valiant rearguard action, however, enabling the British Navy to evacuate 18,000 of the 32,000 Allied troops. The harsh German occupation lasted throughout WWII, with many mountain villages bombed or burnt down and their occupants executed en masse. Nevertheless, the Cretans (with foreign assistance) waged a significant resistance campaign that continually vexed and distracted their German military rulers.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Most travellers arrive in Crete by air, usually with a change in Athens. Iraklio's **Nikos Kazantzakis Airport** (www.heraklion-airport.info) is Crete's busiest airport, although **Hania** (www.chania-airport.com) is convenient for travellers heading to western Crete. Sitia is slated for expansion but for now only receives domestic flights.



Crete Highlights

- 1** Make a date with King Minos at the **Palace of Knossos** (p268)
- 2** Follow up a pilgrimage to **Moni Preveli** (p283) with a swim on palm-studded **Preveli Beach** (p283)
- 3** Explore Minoan ruins and sample the local tippie in **Iraklio Wine Country** (p272)
- 4** Embark on an aimless wander around the evocative historic quarter of **Hania** (p285)
- 5** Find out why **Moni Arkadiou** (p279) occupies



such an important spot in the Cretan soul

6 Feel the poignant history of the former leper colony on **Spinalonga Island** (p306)

7 Cycle among windmills on the **Lasithi Plateau** (p301)

8 Revel in isolated **Elafonisi** (p298), Crete's most magical beach

9 Get lost in the charismatic jumble of buildings in **Rethymno's old quarter** (p275)

10 Hike the **Samaria Gorge** (p293), Europe's longest canyon

Between May and October, European low-cost carriers and charter airlines such as easyJet, Germanwings, AirBerlin, Fly Thomas Cook and Jet2 operate direct flights to Crete, mostly from UK and German airports. Aegean Airlines has year-round direct flights to Crete from London, Milan, Paris and Rome; coming from another destination requires connecting in Athens. Olympic Air serves Crete from Athens and Thessaloniki. There are no direct flights to Crete from North America. Travellers connect via a European gateway city such as Paris, Amsterdam or Frankfurt and sometimes again in Athens.

To reach Crete by air from other Greek islands usually requires changing in Athens, except for flights operated by Crete-based airline **Sky Express** (www.skyexpress.gr), which are detailed in the following table.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM CRETE

DESTINATION	AIRPORT	DURATION	FARE (ONE WAY)
Alexandroupoli	Sitia	1½hr	€90
Athens	Iraklio	50min	€85
Corfu	Iraklio	1¾hr	€140
Ikaría	Iraklio	1½hr	€110
Kalamata	Iraklio	1hr	€120
Kos	Iraklio	1hr	€120
Lesvos (Mytilini)	Iraklio	1¼hr	€130
Mykonos	Iraklio	1½hr	€95
Preveza	Sitia	1¾hr	€90
Rodos	Iraklio	1hr	€80
Samos (Vathi)	Iraklio	1hr	€130
Santorini (Thira)	Iraklio	30min	€70
Volos	Iraklio	1¼hr	€115

Boat

Crete is well served by ferry with at least one daily departure from Piraeus (near Athens) to Iraklio and Hania year-round and three or four per day in summer. There are also slower ferries once or twice a week to Sitia in the east and the western port of Kissamos-Kastelli. Services are considerably curtailed from November to April. Timetables change from season to season, and ferries are subject to delays and cancellations at short notice due to bad weather, strikes or mechanical problems.

Ferry companies operating from Crete are **Anek Lines** (www.aneke.gr), **Hellenic Seaways** (www.hellenicseaways.gr), **Lane Lines** (www.lane.gr), **Minoan Lines** (www.minoan.gr) and **Sea Jets** (www.seajets.gr).

The following table should be used as a guideline only since actual schedules and prices fluctuate frequently. Prices quoted are for deck seating. For current routes and timetables, consult the ferry company's website or go to

www.gtp.gr, www.openseas.gr, www.ferries.gr or www.greekferries.gr. The latter two also have a ticket-booking function.

BOAT SERVICES FROM CRETE

ROUTE	FERRY COMPANY	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Iraklio-Karpathos	Aigaion Pelagos	7½hr	€18	2 weekly
Iraklio-Kasos	Aigaion Pelagos	5¾hr	€18	2 weekly
Iraklio-Milos	Aigaion Pelagos	7½hr	€20	2 weekly
Iraklio-Mykonos	Hellenic Seaways	4¾hr	€77	1 daily
Iraklio-Paros	Hellenic Seaways	4hr	€75.50	1 daily
Iraklio-Piraeus	Minoan, Anek	6½-9½hr	€28-36	1-2 daily
Iraklio-Rhodes	Anek	12½hr	€29	1 weekly
Iraklio-Santorini (Thira)	Anek	4¼hr	€15	2 weekly
Iraklio-Santorini (Thira)	Sea Jets, Hellenic Seaways	2hr	€48.50-51.50	1 daily per company
Hania-Piraeus	Anek	8½hr	€35	1-2 daily
Kissamos-Antikythira	Lane	2hr	€9	2 weekly
Kissamos-Kastelli-Gythio	Lane	6½hr	€20	2 weekly
Kissamos-Kastelli-Kythira	Lane	3½hr	€14	up to 2 daily
Kissamos-Kastelli-Piraeus	Lane	10½hr	€24	2 weekly
Sitia-Karpathos	Anek	4½hr	€19	2 weekly
Sitia-Kassos	Anek	2½hr	€11	2 weekly
Sitia-Milos	Anek	11hr	€25	2 weekly

Getting Around

Buses are the only form of public transport in Crete, but a fairly extensive network makes it relatively easy to travel around the island. For schedules and prices, go to www.bus-service-crete-ktel.com.

There's hourly service along the main northern coastal road and less-frequent buses to the inland villages and towns on the south coast. Buses also go to major tourist attractions, including Knossos, Phaestos, Moni Arkadiou, Moni Preveli, Omalos (for the Samaria Gorge) and Hora Sfakion. For details, see individual destinations.

Taxis are widely available except in remote villages. Large towns have taxi stands that post a list of prices, otherwise you pay what's on the meter. If a taxi has no meter, settle on a price before driving off.

CENTRAL CRETE

Central Crete comprises the Iraklio prefecture, named after the island's burgeoning capital, and the Rethymno prefecture, named after its lovely Venetian port town. Along with its dynamic urban life and Venetian remnants, the region is home to the island's top-rated tourist attraction, the Palace of Knossos, as well as other major and minor Minoan sites. Even if the coastal stretch east of the city of Iraklio is one continuous band of hotels and resorts, just a little bit inland villages sweetly lost in time provide pleasing contrast. Taste the increasingly sophisticated tipple produced in the Iraklio Wine County, walk in the footsteps of El Greco and Nikos Kazantzakis and revel in the rustic grandeur of the mountain village of Zaros.

Rethymno is a fascinating quilt of bubbly resorts, centuries-old villages and energising towns. Away from the northern coast, you'll quickly find yourself immersed in endless tranquillity and natural beauty as you drift through such villages as Anogia, where locals cherish their timeless traditions. The south coast is a different animal altogether – a wild beauty with steep gorges and bewitching beaches in seductive isolation, along with the relaxed resort of Plakias and the old hippie hang-out of Matala.

Iraklio Ηράκλειο

POP 137,390

Crete's capital city, Iraklio (ee-rah-klee-oh, also called Heraklion), is Greece's fifth-largest city and the island's economic and administrative hub. It's a somewhat hectic place, roaring with motorbikes throttling in unison at traffic lights and aeroplanes thrusting off into the sky over a long waterfront lined with the remnants of Venetian arsenals, fortresses and shrines.

Though not pretty in a conventional way, Iraklio can grow on you if you take the time to explore its nuances and wander its backstreets. A revitalised waterfront invites strolling and the newly pedestrianised historic centre is punctuated by bustling squares rimmed by buildings from the time when Columbus set sail.

Iraklio has a certain urban sophistication, with a thriving cafe and restaurant scene, the island's best shopping and lively nightlife. Of course, don't miss its blockbuster sights either, like the amazing archaeological museum and the Palace of Knossos, both fascinating windows into Minoan culture.

History

Populated since neolithic times, Iraklio was conquered by the Saracens in AD 824 and reputedly became the Eastern Med's slave-trade capital. Byzantine troops ousted the Arabs in AD 961 and named the town Handakas. This was changed to Candia in 1204 when Crete was sold to the Venetians.

Venice used Crete and its well-defended capital to expand its maritime commercial empire. The fortifications it built were sufficiently strong to keep the Ottomans at bay for 21 years, even after the rest of Crete was lost; the Venetians finally surrendered Candia in 1669.

When Turkish control over Crete ended in 1898, Hania became the capital and Candia was renamed Iraklio. However, the city's central location soon saw it emerge as the island's commercial centre and it resumed its position as Crete's capital in 1971.

Sights

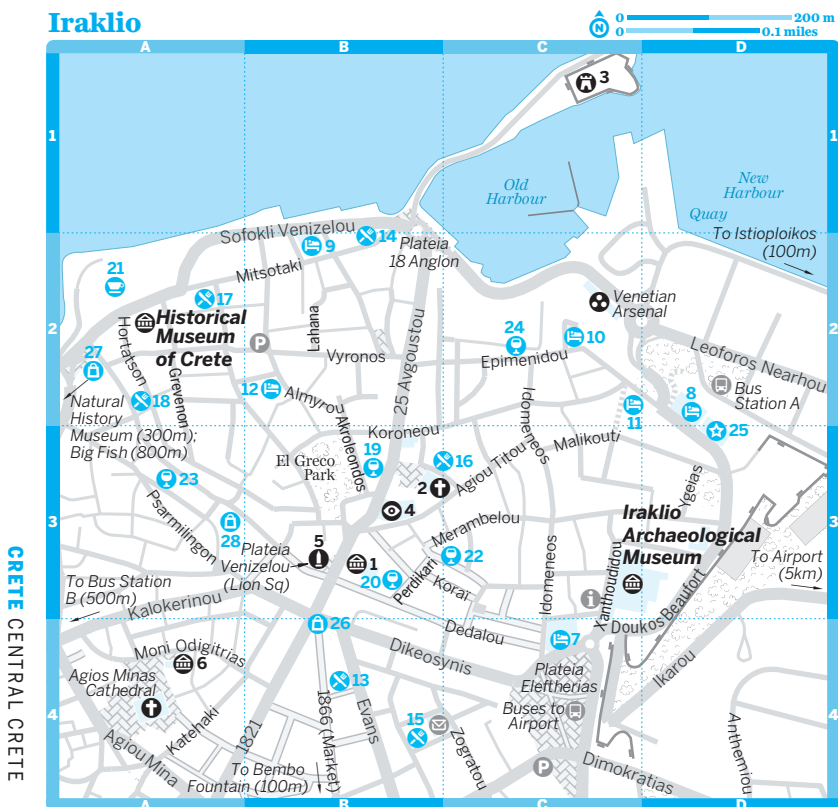
Iraklio's main sights are wedged within the historic town, hemmed in by the waterfront and the old city walls. Many of the finest buildings line up along the main thoroughfare, 25 Avgoustou, which skirts the lovely central square, Plateia Venizelou (also called Lion Sq after its landmark Morosini Fountain). East of here, Korai is the hub of Iraklio's cafe scene, which leads towards the sprawling Plateia Eleftherias with the archaeological museum nearby.

TOP CHOICE Iraklio Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(2)2810 279000; <http://odysseus.culture.gr>; Xanthoudidou 2; adult/concession €4/2, incl Knossos €10/5; ☎8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar, extended hr Apr-Oct, call for details) This outstanding museum

Iraklio



CRETE CENTRAL CRETE

is one of the largest and most important in Greece. There are artefacts spanning 5500 years from neolithic to Roman times, but it's rightly most famous for its extensive Minoan collection. A visit here will greatly enhance your understanding and appreciation of Crete's history and culture. Don't skip it.

The main museum building has been closed for restoration since 2006 with no firm reopening date available at the time of writing. In the meantime, the key exhibits are beautifully displayed in an annex entered from Hatzidakis St. While the temporary exhibition only includes 400 of the 15,000 artefacts normally on display, it is presented to international museum standards and features all the main masterpieces. The treasure trove includes pottery, jewellery, figurines and sarcophagi, plus some famous frescoes. The most exciting finds come from the sites of Knossos, Phaestos, Zakros, Malia and Agia Triada.

The superlative Knossos frescoes include the **Procession fresco**, the **Griffin Fresco** (from the Throne Room), the **Dolphin Fresco** (from the Queen's Room) and the amazing **Bull-leaping Fresco**, which depicts a seemingly double-jointed acrobat somersaulting on the back of a charging bull.

Other frescoes include the lovely restored **Prince of the Lilies**, along with two frescoes from the New Palace period – the priestess archaeologists have dubbed **La Parisienne** and the **Saffron Gatherer**.

Also from Knossos are **Linear A and B tablets** (the latter have been translated as household or business accounts), an ivory statue of a **bull-leaper** and some exquisite **gold seals**.

From the Middle Minoan period, the most striking piece is the 20cm black-stone **Bull's Head**, a libation vessel with a fine head of curls, gold horns and painted crystal eyes. Other fascinating contemporaneous exhibits

Iraklio

📍 Top Sights

- Historical Museum of Crete A2
- Iraklio Archaeological Museum C3

📍 Sights

- 1 Agios Markos Basilica B3
- 2 Church of Agios Titos B3
- 3 Koules Fortress C1
- 4 Loggia B3
- 5 Morosini Fountain B3
- Municipal Art Gallery (see 1)
- 6 Museum of Religious Art A4

🛏 Sleeping

- 7 Capsis Astoria C4
- 8 GDM Megaron D2
- 9 Kronos Hotel B2
- 10 Lato Hotel C2
- 11 Marin Dream Hotel C2
- 12 Mirabello Hotel B2

🌳 Eating

- Brilliant/Herb's Garden (see 10)

- 13 Giakoumis B4
- 14 Ippokambos B2
- 15 Kouzina tis Popis B4
- 16 Pagopoieion C3
- 17 Parasies A2
- 18 Prassein Aloga A2

🍷 Drinking

- 19 Central Park B3
- 20 Fix B3
- 21 Mare A2
- 22 Mayo Lounge & Harem Oriental Club C3
- 23 Utopia A3
- 24 Veneto C2

🎬 Entertainment

- 25 Privilege D3

🛍 Shopping

- 26 Iraklio Market B4
- 27 Planet International Bookshop A2
- 28 Road Editions A3

include figurines of a bare-breasted **snake goddess** found in a Knossos shrine.

Among the treasures of Minoan jewellery is the beautiful **gold bee pendant** from Malia, depicting two bees dropping honey into a comb.

From Phaestos, the prized find is the fascinating **Phaestos Disk**, a 16cm circular clay tablet inscribed with (still undeciphered) pictographic symbols.

Examples of the elaborate **Kamares pottery**, named after the sacred cave of Kamares where it was discovered, include a superbly decorated vase from Phaestos with white sculpted flowers.

Finds from Zakros include the gorgeous **crystal rhyton** vase, discovered in over 300 fragments and painstakingly repaired, along with vessels decorated with floral and marine designs.

The most famous of Minoan sarcophagi, and one of Minoan art's greatest achievements, is the **sarcophagus of Agia Triada**, painted with floral and abstract designs and ritual scenes. Other significant Agia Triada finds include the **Harvester Vase**, of which only the top part remains, depicting young farm workers returning from olive picking. Another, the **Boxer Vase**, shows Minoans indulging in two of their favourite pastimes,

wrestling and bull-grappling. The **Chieftain Cup** depicts a more cryptic scene: a chief holding a staff and three men carrying animal skins.

Finds from Minoan cemeteries include two small clay models of groups of figures, found in a *tholos* (tomb shaped like a beehive). One depicts four male dancers in a circle, arms around one another's shoulders, possibly participants in a funerary ritual.

More insight into the inscrutable lifestyle of the Minoans can be gleaned from another exhibit, the elaborate **gaming board** decorated with ivory, crystal, glass, gold and silver, from Knossos' New Palace period.

Historical Museum of Crete

MUSEUM

(☎)2810 283219; www.historical-museum.gr; Sofokli Venizelou; adult/concession €5/3; ☀9am-5pm (Mon-Sat) Exhibits at this highly engaging museum hopscotch from the Byzantine to the Venetian and Turkish periods, culminating in WWII. There are excellent English labels and multimedia and listening stations throughout.

First-floor highlights include the only two **El Greco paintings** in Crete, 13th- and 14th-century frescoes, exquisite Venetian gold jewellery and embroidered vestments. A historical exhibit charts Crete's road to independence from the Turks in the early 20th century. The most interesting rooms

are on the 2nd floor with several dedicated to *Zorba the Greek* author **Nikos Kazantzakis** and others dramatically detailing aspects of the WWII **Battle of Crete**, including exhibits on the Cretan resistance and the role of Allied Secret Services. The top floor features an outstanding **folklore collection**.

Natural History Museum MUSEUM
(☎2810 282740; www.nhmc.uoc.gr; Sofokli Venizelou; adult/concession €6/4; ☀9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep; shorter hr Oct-May) In a cleverly recycled power station, this museum delivers the predictable introduction to regional fauna and flora but also gets creative kudos for its hands-on Discovery Centre, living zoo and earthquake simulator. The star exhibit, though, is the life-size representation of the elephantlike *Deinotherium giganteum*, the world's third-largest land mammal known to have existed, standing 5m tall. The museum is about a 10-minute walk west from 25 Avgoustou along the waterfront.

Koules Fortress FORTRESS
(Harbour; adult/concession €2/1; ☀8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Apr) Iraklio's main landmark, this squat and square 16th-century fortress at the end of the Old Harbour jetty was called Rocca al Mare under the Venetians. It stopped the Turks for 21 years and later became a Turkish prison for Cretan rebels. The 26 restored rooms sometimes host art exhibits and performances. The view from the top takes in the vaulted arcades of the **Arsenali**, built to shelter and repair the Venetian fleet.

Morosini Fountain FOUNTAIN
(Plateia Venizelou) Also known as Lion Fountain, this is the most beloved of the Venetian vestiges around town. It spurts water from four lions' jaws into eight sinuous marble troughs. The centrepiece marble statue of Poseidon was destroyed during the Turkish occupation.

FREE Municipal Art Gallery ART GALLERY
(☎2810 399228; 25 Avgoustou; ☀9am-1.30pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri; 9am-1pm Sat) The triple-aisled 13th-century Agios Markos Basilica was reconstructed many times and turned into a mosque by the Turks. Today it's an elaborate backdrop for art by Maria Fiorakis, Lefteris Kanakakis, Thomas Fanorakis and other Cretan creatives.

Bembo Fountain FOUNTAIN
(Plateia Kornarou) The delightful fountain – the city's first – was cobbled together in the 1550s from antique materials, including a statue of a Roman official found near Ierapetra. The adjacent hexagonal building, now a cafe, was originally a pump-house added by the Turks.

Loggia HISTORIC BUILDING
(25 Avgoustou) Iraklio's town hall is housed in the attractive 17th-century Loggia, a Venetian version of a gentleman's club, where the male aristocracy once gathered for drinks and gossip.

Church of Agios Titos CHURCH
(Plateia Agiou Titou) This majestic church has Byzantine origins in AD 961; it was subsequently converted to a Catholic church by the Venetians and turned into a mosque by the Ottomans. It has been an Orthodox Church since 1925. Since 1966, it has once again sheltered the much prized skull relic of St Titus, returned here after being spirited to Venice for safe-keeping during the Turkish occupation.

Museum of Religious Art MUSEUM
(☎2810 288825; Moni Odigitrias) The former Church of Agia Ekaterini houses this superb collection of Cretan icons, including six by El Greco – mentor Mihail Damaskinos. It was being renovated at press time and is expected to reopen in 2012.

★ Festivals & Events

Iraklio Summer Festival ARTS
From July to mid-September Iraklio celebrates the summer with top-notch dance, music, theatre and cinema performances held primarily at the Nikos Kazantzakis and Manos Hatzidakis open-air theatres.

Sleeping

TOP CHOICE Lato Hotel BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€
(☎2810 228103; www.lato.gr; Epimenidou 15; d incl breakfast €90-120;    ) Iraklio goes Hollywood – with all the sass but sans attitude – at this mod boutique hotel near the Old Harbour. In 2011, rather than resting on their laurels, the owners opened an even more stylish extension behind a jazzy facade across the street. Rooms here are dressed in warm reds and sport rich timbers, custom furniture, pillow-top mattresses and a kettle for making coffee or tea. Back rooms overlook a modernist metal sculpture.

Kronos Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎2810 282240; www.kronoshotel.gr; Sofokli Venizelou 2; s/d €44/50; 🍷🍷🍷) After a thorough makeover this waterfront hotel has pole-vaulted to the top of the budget hotel category. Rooms have double-glazed windows as well as balconies, phone, a tiny TV and fridge. Doubles with sea views cost €58. Breakfast is €6.

Capsis Astoria

HOTEL €€

(☎2810 343080; www.capsishotel.gr; Plateia Eleftherias; s/d incl breakfast €108/140; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) The hulking exterior does not impress but past the front door the Capsis is a class act all the way to the rooftop pool. Rooms have been spiffed up and now sport soothing neutral tones, ultracomfy mattresses and historic black-and-white photographs. Fabulous breakfast buffet.

Marin Dream Hotel

HOTEL €€

(☎2810 300018; www.marinhotel.gr; Epimenidou 46; r incl breakfast €95-120; 🍷🍷🍷) Although primarily a business hotel, the Marin Dream also scores with leisure travellers for its great location overlooking the harbour and the fortress (ask for a front room with balcony). A colour palette of chocolate and cherry give rooms a clean, grown-up look.

GDM Megaron

HOTEL €€€

(☎2810 305300; www.gdmmegaron.gr; Doukos Beaufort 9; s/d incl breakfast from €140/168; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) This towering harbour-front hulk is a distinctive designer abode with comfortable beds, jacuzzis in the VIP suites, and plasma-screen TVs and a fax in every room. Unwinding by the glass-sided pool and drinking in the sweeping views from the rooftop restaurant and bar are both pleasing diversions.

Mirabello Hotel

HOTEL €€

(☎2810 285052; www.mirabello-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 20; d with/without bathroom €60/48; ☺Apr-Nov; 🍷🍷🍷) This friendly and relaxed hotel on a quiet street is hardly of recent vintage but it does remain a decent value-for-money standby. Rooms are immaculate if a bit cramped and sport TVs, phones and balconies; some also have fridges.

**Eating**

Many restaurants close on Sundays.

**Brilliant/Herb's Garden**

CRETAN €€

(☎2810 228103; www.brilliantrestaurant.gr; Epimenidou 15; mains €10-23; 🍷) The avant-garde

decor at Brilliant, the Lato Hotel's hip culinary outpost, might almost distract you from the creatively composed, feistily flavoured Cretan cuisine. Orange-marinated chicken cooked with vine-leaf juice, walnuts and tomato is a typical palate tantaliser. From May to October, the restaurant renames itself Herb's Garden and moves to the hotel's rooftop for alfresco dining with harbour views.

Prassein Aloga

MEDITERRANEAN €€

(☎2810 283429; cnr Handakos & Kydonias 21; mains €7-23) This rustic neighbourhood favourite has an ever-changing menu of sharp and innovative Mediterranean cuisine. Expect heaping salads, pasta loaded with shrimp and mussels, and dishes based on ancient Greek recipes. At press time, there were plans to move into bigger digs by 2012.

Kouzina tis Popis

INTERNATIONAL €€

(Smyrnis 19; mains €7-11) With its big wooden tables, fireplace and photographs, this place feels as warm and welcoming as a friend's kitchen. The menu draws influences from Greek, Arabic and Mediterranean cuisines and may include smoked mackerel fillet, mustard chicken or zucchini-stuffed pastry rolls.

Parasies

GREEK €€€

(☎2810 225009; Plateia Istorikou Mouseiou; mains €6-24) One of four tavernas on the little square next to the Historical Museum, Parasies is a warm and woody nook. It's usually packed with locals lusting after its fresh meats and seafood merrily cooking away on a wood-fired grill in the open kitchen.

Istioploikos

FISH €

(Port; mains €6-14) Watching the bobbing boats on a balmy evening is a special treat at this port restaurant affiliated with the local yacht club. Whatever is caught that day ends up on the plates, expertly cooked to order over a lusty wood fire. The meatless *lathanodomadhes* (stuffed cabbage) are a highly recommended side dish.

Ippokambos

SEAFOOD €

(Sofokli Venizelou; dishes €4.50-11) Locals give this unpretentious *ouzerie* (place that serves ouzo and snacks) an enthusiastic thumbs up and we are only too happy to follow suit. Fish is the thing here, freshly caught, simply but expertly prepared and sold at fair prices. In summer, park yourself on the covered waterfront terrace.

Pagopoieion

INTERNATIONAL €€

(www.pagopoieion.gr; Plateia Agiou Titou; mains €7-18; ☺10am-late) In a former ice factory, this arty cafe-bar has eclectic decorations (check out the toilets and the Nazi graffiti). Regulars swear by the creative food, but it's also fine to drop in for just coffee and nibbles. At night the attached bar kicks into high gear and the upstairs performance venue occasionally hosts concerts, art and readings.

Giakoumis

GREEK €€

(Theodosaki 5-8; mains €6-13) The oldest among the row of tavernas vying for business in a quiet passageway off 1866, Giakoumis offers myriad *mayirefta* (ready-cooked meals) along with grilled meats that you can inspect before they land on the grill. A nice spot for a shopping-spreespite.

**Drinking**

The see-and-be-seen scene sprawls in oversized sofas along Korai, Perdikari and Milátou (sometimes called the Korai quarter) and around El Greco Park. West of here, Handakos, Agiostefaniton and Psaromilgikon have more alternative-flavoured hangouts. Most places open mid-morning or at noon and close in the wee hours, changing stripes and clientele as the hands on the clock move on.

Fix

CAFE, BAR

(Perdikari 4) If the trendy cafes along this pedestrian strip don't do it for you, grab a table in this down-to-earth joint that's sought out by an older crowd of chatty conversationalists.

Mayo Lounge & Harem Oriental Club

CAFE, LOUNGE BAR

(Milátou) This high-octane hot spot has dramatic design and is a good place to sample the buzz. Sink into comfy wicker sofas on terraced platforms lidded by a wooden roof that's held up by giant funnel-shaped lamps or heed the call of the kasbah upstairs where there's an overstuffed cushion with your name on it in one of the sultry tented nooks.

Veneto

CAFE, BAR

(Epimenidou 9) This lofty space with exposed wooden rafters and clubby leather chairs has panoramic windows overlooking the Venetian harbour and is a good spot for coffee, cocktails or a light meal.

DON'T MISS**IRAKLIO MARKET**

An Iraklio institution, this busy narrow market along Odos 1866 (1866 St) is one of the best in Crete and has everything you need to put together a delicious picnic. Stock up on the freshest fruit and vegetables, creamy cheeses, local honey, succulent olives, fresh breads and whatever else grabs your fancy. There are also plenty of other stalls selling pungent herbs, leather goods, hats, jewellery and some souvenirs. Cap off a spree with lunch at Giakoumis or another nearby taverna (avoid those in the market itself).

Utopia

CAFE

(Handakos 51) This hushed old-style cafe has the best hot chocolate in town (also a decadent chocolate fondue), although the prices are utopian indeed.

Mare

CAFE, BAR

(www.mare-cafe.gr; Sofokli Venizelou) In an enviable location on the beautified waterfront promenade opposite the Historical Museum, contemporary Mare is great for post-cultural java and sunset drinks, but skip the food.

Central Park

CAFE, LOUNGE BAR

(Akroleondos) Grab an outdoor table, guzzle a cold one and watch the world on parade at this buzzy cafe.

★ Entertainment**Big Fish**

CLUB

(cnr Sofokli Venizelou & Makariou 17; ☺from 10pm) At this fun-for-all party pen in an old stone building on the waterfront, local and international spinmeisters feed the young and flirty with high-energy dance music.

Privilege

CLUB

(Doukos Beaufort 7; ☺from 10pm) This massive, mainstream club lures up to 1000 revellers with a high-octane mix of dance, rock, electro and Greek sounds.

🛍 Shopping

For English books, travel guides, international periodicals and maps, head to one of the following:

Planet International Bookshop (☎2810 289605; Handakos 73)

Road Editions (☎2810 344610; Handakos 29)

i Information

Iraklio's two hospitals are far from the centre and work alternate days – call first to find out where to go. Banks with ATMs are ubiquitous, especially along 25 Avgoustou. For online information, try www.heraklion-city.gr.

Netc@fe (Odos 1878 4; per hr €1.50; ☎10am-2am) Has full services.

Post office (Plateia Daskalogianni; ☎7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist Office (☎2810 246299; Xanthoulidou 1; ☎8.30am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar) Staffed by university interns with various depths of knowledge and enthusiasm. Meagre selection of brochures and maps.

Tourist police (☎2810 397111; Halikarnassos; ☎7am-10pm) In the Halikarnassos suburb near the airport.

University Hospital (☎2810 392111) At Voutes, 5km south of Iraklio, this is Iraklio's best equipped medical facility.

Venizelio Hospital (☎2810 368000) On the road to Knossos, 4km south of Iraklio.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Nikos Kazantzakis International Airport

(☎2810 228401; www.heraklion-airport.info) Crete's biggest airport is about 5km east of the city centre and has a bank, an ATM, a duty-free shop and a cafe-bar.

Boat

The ferry port is 500m to the east of the old port. In season, boats to Piraeus leave several times daily and there's also weekly service to Karpathos, Kasos, Milos, Rhodes and Santorini (Thira). Daily ferries head for Mykonos, Paros and Santorini.

Bus

Iraklio has two major bus stations. **Bus Station A**, near the waterfront east of Koules Fortress, serves eastern and western Crete (including Knossos). Local buses also stop here. The left-luggage office is open from 6.30am to 8pm and charges €2 per piece per day. Most buses use the main coastal highway, but at least one or two each day use the scenic but slower old national road, so double-check before boarding.

Bus Station B, just beyond Hania Gate west of the centre, serves Anogia, Phaestos, Agia Galini and Matala. Service is greatly reduced on weekends. For details, see www.bus-service-crete-ktel.com.

The following table should only serve as a guideline as there are significant seasonal varia-

tions. See <http://bus-service-crete-ktel.com> for the latest information.

BUS SERVICES FROM IRAKLIO

FROM BUS STATION A

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Agios Nikolaos	1½hr	€7.10	hourly
Arhanes	30min	€1.70	hourly
Hania	3hr	€10.50	up to 17 daily
Hersonisos	40min	€3	at least half-hourly
Ierapetra	2½hr	€11	up to 6 daily
Knossos	20min	€1.50	3 hourly
Lasithi Plateau	2hr	€6.50	1 daily
Malia	1hr	€3.80	at least half-hourly
Rethymno	1½hr	€7.60	up to 17 daily
Sitia	3¼hr	€14.70	4 daily

FROM BUS STATION B

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Agia Galini	2hr	€8	up to 6 daily
Anogia	1hr	€3.80	up to 3 daily
Matala	2hr	€7.80	up to 5 daily
Phaestos	1½hr	€6.30	up to 8 daily

i Getting Around

To/from the Airport

The airport is just off the E75 motorway. Bus 1 connects it with the city centre every 10 minutes between 6.15am and 10.45pm (€1.10). Buses stop on the far side of the car park outside the terminal building. In town, buses terminate at Plateia Eleftherias. A taxi into town costs around €10.

Car & Motorcycle

Iraklio's streets are narrow and chaotic, so it's best to leave your car in one of the car parks dotted round the city centre. Rates range from €3 to €5 per day.

All the international car-hire companies have branches at the airport. Local outlets line the northern end of 25 Avgoustou and include the following:

Motor Club (☎2810 222408; www.motorclub.gr; Plateia Anglon 18)

Sun Rise (☎2810 221609; www.sunrise-cars-bikes.gr; 25 Avgoustou 46)

Taxi

There are small taxi stands all over town, but the main ones are at Bus Station A and on Plateia Eleftherias. To order one by phone, dial ☎2810 210102/146/168.

Cretaquarium

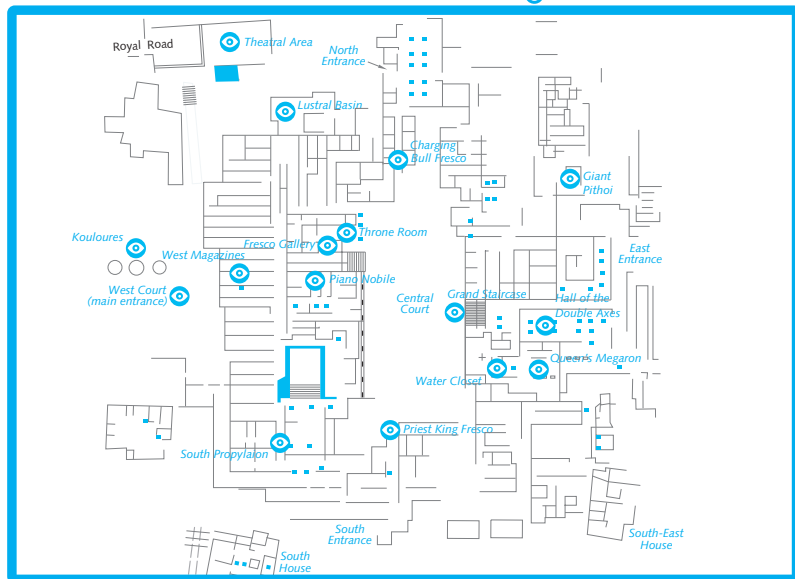
The massive **Cretaquarium** (☎2810 337788; www.cretaquarium.gr; adult/child & senior €8/6; ☀9.30am-9pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr; 📶) at Gournes, 15km east of Iraklio, is a vast high-tech indoor sea on the grounds of a former US Air Force base. Inhabited by some 2500 Mediterranean and tropical aquatic critters, this huge aquarium will likely bring smiles to even the most Playstation-jaded youngster. Interactive multimedia help explain the mysteries of this underwater world.

Half-hourly buses (€1.70, 30 minutes) from Iraklio's Bus Station A can drop you on the main road; from there it's a 10-minute walk.

Knossos Κνωσός

Crete's must-see historical attraction is the Minoan **Palace of Knossos** (☎2810 231940; adult/concession €6/3; ☀8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-3pm Nov-Mar), the capital of Minoan Crete and only 5km south of Iraklio. To beat the crowds and avoid the heat, get there before 10am and budget at least two hours. Guided tours (in English, €10) last about 90 minutes and leave from the kiosk past the ticket booth.

Palace of Knossos



History

Knossos' first palace (1900 BC) was destroyed by an earthquake around 1700 BC, rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design, partially destroyed again between 1500 and 1450 BC and inhabited for another 50 years before finally burning down. The complex comprised royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasuries and storerooms, all orbiting a central court.

The ruins of Knossos were unearthed in 1900 by the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (1851-1941). Evans was so enthralled by his discovery that he spent 35 years and £250,000 of his own money excavating and reconstructing sections of the palace. His reconstruction methods continue to be controversial, with many archaeologists believing that he sacrificed accuracy to his overly vivid imagination. For the casual visitor, though, the reconstructions help tremendously in visualising what the palace might have looked like in its heyday.

Exploring the Site

Evans' reconstruction brings to life the palace's most significant parts, including the columns that are painted deep brown-red with gold-trimmed black capitals and taper gracefully at the bottom. Vibrant frescoes add dramatic flourishes. The advanced

OTHER MINOAN SITES

Besides Knossos, central Crete has a trio of other major Minoan sites as well as numerous smaller vestiges. None were reconstructed and thus provide a more unadulterated glimpse into the life of this ancient society without Evans' architectural interpretations.

Phaestos Φαιστός

Some 63km southwest of Iraklio, **Phaestos** (☎28920 42315; adult/concession/under 18 & EU students €4/2/free, incl Agia Triada €6/3/free; ☀8am-7.30pm Jun-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Apr) was Crete's second-most-important Minoan palace-city after Knossos and enjoys the most awe-inspiring setting with panoramic views of the Mesara Plain and Mt Psiloritis. The palace layout is similar to Knossos, with rooms arranged around a central court. And, like Knossos, most of Phaestos (fes-tos) was built atop a previously destroyed older palace. But the site also has its own distinctive attractiveness. There's an air of mystery about the desolate, unreconstructed ruins altogether lacking at Knossos. Also in contrast to Knossos, there were few frescoes as walls were apparently covered with white gypsum only.

Past the ticket booth, stairs lead down to the **West Court**; the **Theatral Area** with seats are at the northern end. From here, a 15m-wide **Grand Staircase** leads to the **Propylon** (a porch) and the **Central Court**, which was once framed by columned porticos. It is well preserved and gives a sense of the size and magnificence of the palace. On the court's north side, a column-flanked **Formal Doorway** leads to the north court; the **Peristyle Court**, which once had a paved verandah, is to the left. The royal apartments (**Queen's Megaron** and **King's Megaron**) are northeast of the Peristyle Court. The celebrated Phaestos Disk, now in the Iraklio Archaeological Museum, was found in a building to the north of the palace.

Eight buses a day head to Phaestos from Iraklio (€6.30, 1½ hours). There are also buses from Agia Galini (€3.30, 45 minutes) and Matala (€1.70, 30 minutes).

Agia Triada Αγία Τριάδα

Pronounced ah-ye-ah trih-ah-dha, **Agia Triada** (☎28920 91564; adult/concession/under 18 & EU students €3/1.50/free, incl Phaestos €6/3/free; ☀10am-4.30pm summer, 8.30am-3pm winter), 3km west of Phaestos, was most likely a small palace or royal villa and also enjoys an enchanting setting with mountain and sea views. Although it succumbed to fire around 1400 BC, the site was never looted, which accounts for the many masterpieces of Minoan art found here. The villa encompassed storage and residential areas flanking two sides of a central courtyard. North of here, a ramp out to sea led to the village where a row of stores is of special interest.

The signposted turn-off to Agia Triada is about 500m past Phaestos on the Matala road. There's no public transport.

Malia Μάλια

On the north coast east of Iraklio, near the eponymous coastal resort, the **Palace of Malia** (☎28970 31597; adult/seniors & EU students/under 18 €4/2/free; ☀8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is a relatively easy site to comprehend thanks to a free map, an exhibition hall and labelling throughout.

Enter from the **West Court**, turn right and walk south along a series of **storage rooms** to eight circular pits believed to have been grain silos. Continue past the silos and enter the palace's **Central Court** from the south. On your left, in the ground, is the **Kernos Stone**, a disc with 24 holes around its edge that may have had a religious function. Just beyond here are the palace's most important rooms, including the **Pillar Crypt** behind a stone-paved vestibule, the **Grand Staircase** and the elevated **Loggia**, most likely used for ceremonial purposes. Still further were the **royal apartments**, while buildings north of the central court held **workshops and storage rooms**.

Half-hourly buses from Iraklio (€3.80, one hour) stop at the palace.

Palace of Knossos

THE HIGHLIGHTS IN TWO HOURS

The Palace of Knossos is Crete's busiest tourist attraction, and for good reason. A spin around the partially reconstructed complex delivers an eye-opening peek into the remarkably sophisticated society of the Minoans, who dominated southern Europe some 4000 years ago.

From the ticket booth, follow the marked trail to the **North Entrance 1** where the Charging Bull fresco gives you a first taste of Minoan artistry. Continue to the Central Court and join the queue waiting to glimpse the mystical **Throne Room 2**, which probably hosted religious rituals. Turn right as you exit and follow the stairs up to the so-called Piano Nobile, where replicas of the palace's most famous artworks conveniently cluster in the **Fresco Room 3**. Walk the length of the Piano Nobile, pausing to look at the clay storage vessels in the West Magazines, to a staircase descending to the **South Portico 4**, beautifully decorated with the Cup Bearer fresco. Make your way back to the Central Court and head to the palace's eastern wing to admire the architecture of the **Grand Staircase 5** that led to the royal family's private quarters. For a closer look at some rooms, walk to the south end of the courtyard, stopping for a peek at the **Prince of the Lilies fresco 6**, and head down to the lower floor. A highlight here is the **Queen's Megaron 7** (bedroom), playfully adorned with a fresco of frolicking dolphins. Stay on the lower level and make your way to the **Giant Pithoi 8**, huge clay jars used for storage.



© ANDREA SCHULTE-FEYERS



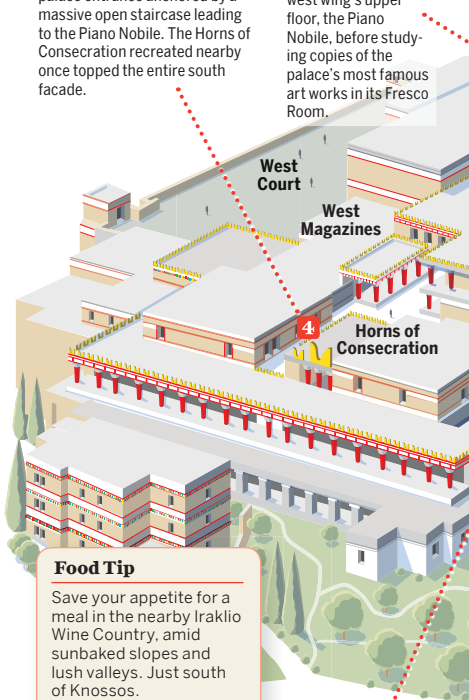
© ANDREA SCHULTE-FEYERS

South Portico

Fine frescoes, most famously the Cup Bearer, embellish this palace entrance anchored by a massive open staircase leading to the Piano Nobile. The Horns of Consecration recreated nearby once topped the entire south facade.

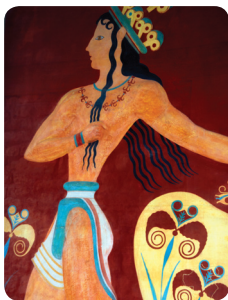
Fresco Room

Take in sweeping views of the palace grounds from the west wing's upper floor, the Piano Nobile, before studying copies of the palace's most famous art works in its Fresco Room.



Food Tip

Save your appetite for a meal in the nearby Iraklio Wine Country, amid sunbaked slopes and lush valleys. Just south of Knossos.



© ANDREA SCHULTE-FEYERS

Prince of the Lilies Fresco

One of Knossos' most beloved frescoes was controversially cobbled together from various fragments and shows a young man adorned in lilies and peacock feathers.

Planning

To beat the crowds and avoid the heat, arrive before 10am. Budget several hours to explore the site thoroughly.



© ANDREA SCHULTE-FREYERS

Throne Room

Evans imagined the mythical King Minos himself holding court seated on the alabaster throne of this beautifully proportioned room. However, the lustral basin and griffin frescoes suggest a religious purpose, possibly under a priestess.



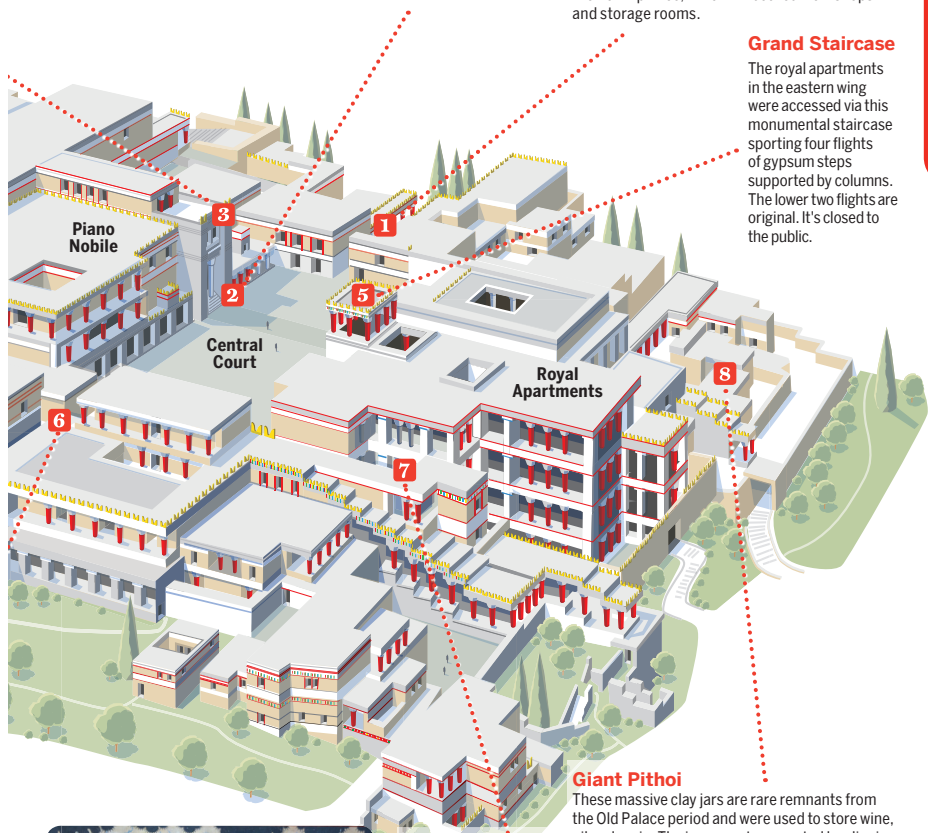
© ANDREA SCHULTE-FREYERS

North Entrance

Bulls held a special status in Minoan society as evidenced by the famous relief fresco of a charging beast gracing the columned west bastion of the north palace, which harboured workshops and storage rooms.

Grand Staircase

The royal apartments in the eastern wing were accessed via this monumental staircase sporting four flights of gypsum steps supported by columns. The lower two flights are original. It's closed to the public.



Giant Pithoi

These massive clay jars are rare remnants from the Old Palace period and were used to store wine, oil and grain. The jars were transported by slinging ropes through a series of handles.



© ANDREA SCHULTE-FREYERS

Queen's Megaron

The queen's bedroom is among the prettiest in the residential eastern wing thanks to the playful Dolphin Fresco. The adjacent bathroom (with clay tub) and toilet are evidence of a sophisticated drainage system.



© ANDREA SCHULTE-FREYERS

drainage system and a clever floorplan that kept rooms cool in summer and warm in winter are further evidence of Minoan advanced living standards.

A tour of the palace starts in the **West Court**, perhaps a former marketplace or the site of public gatherings. The trio of circular pits on your left, called **kouloures**, were once used for grain storage. Turn left at the pits and walk along the palace's western wall and past the **theatral area** to enter the compound via the **North Entrance**. Stop to admire the **Charging Bull Fresco** before continuing to the heart of the palace, the massive and formerly walled **Central Court**. As is typical of Minoan palaces, rooms facing the western side of the courtyard had official and religious purposes, while the residential quarters were on the opposite side.

Grouped around the central court are the palace's most important rooms, including the **Throne Room** on your right. Peering through security glass, you can make out a simple, beautifully proportioned alabaster throne and walls decorated with frescoes of griffins, regarded as sacred by Minoans. Beyond the Throne Room a staircase leads to the upper floor (called **Piano Nobile** by Evans) where the reception and staterooms may have been located. The restored room

at the north end of Piano Nobile houses replicas of the most famous frescoes found at Knossos, including the **bull-leaper**, the **Ladies in Blue** and the **Blue Bird**. The originals are now in the Iraklio Archaeological Museum. At the far south end of the Piano Nobile, past the **west magazines** (storage rooms), steps lead down to the **South Propylaion** adorned with the Cup Bearer fresco.

Backtrack to the Central Court and cross it to get to the impressive **grand staircase** once leading down to the royal apartments. These are largely off-limits to visitors but you can study the room layout from above and catch glimpses of several rooms by walking to the lower level. These include the king's quarters (megaron) in the **Hall of the Double Axes**, a spacious double room in which the ruler both slept and carried out court duties. It takes its name from the double axe marks (*labrys*) on its light well, a sacred symbol to the Minoans and the origin of the word 'labyrinth'.

Next door, down a narrow walkway, is the **queen's megaron**, where you spy through glass a copy of the **Dolphin Fresco**, one of the most exquisite Minoan artworks. The adjacent bathroom, complete with terracotta bathtub and a **water closet**, is being touted as the first ever to work on the flush principle; water was poured down by hand.

IRAKLIO WINE COUNTRY

About 70% of wine produced in Crete comes from the Iraklio Wine Country, which starts just south of Knossos and is headquartered in Peza. Almost two dozen wineries are embedded in a harmonious landscape of shapely hills, sunbaked slopes and lush valleys. Winemakers cultivate many indigenous Cretan grape varieties, such as Kotsifali, Mandilari and Malvasia; quite a few now offer tours, wine museums and wine tastings. Pick up the free *Wine Roads of Heraklion* map at the Iraklio tourist office or at any of the estates, including:

Arhanes Coop (☎2810 753208; ☺9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Wine has been produced in Arhanes since Minoan times.

Boutari (☎2810 731617; www.boutari.gr; ☺9am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun summer) This sleek and modern operation is in Skalani, about 8km from Iraklio.

Lyrarakis (☎2810 284614; www.lyrarakis.gr; ☺10am-1pm, call to confirm) In Alagni, 6km south of Peza, this winery has won international awards and is famous for reviving two nearly extinct white Cretan wine varieties.

Minos-Miliarikis (☎2810 741213; www.minoswines.gr; ☺9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Right on the Peza main street, Minos was the first winery to bottle its product in Crete in 1952.

Among the many fine restaurants in the wine country, **Elia & Diosmos** (☎2810 731283; www.olive-mint.com; mains €8-17) in Skalani is a veritable foodie playground. Owner-chef Argiro Barda creates progressive Cretan dishes that chase the seasons. Classic choices include succulent lamb chops with honey, fluffy fennel pie, and feisty pork with figs, plums and pistachios. It's also a good lunch spot if you're visiting Knossos.

LITERARY VILLAGE

Myrtia, some 15km southeast of Iraklio, is the ancestral village of *Zorba the Greek* author Nikos Kazantzakis and home to the excellent **Nikos Kazantzakis Museum** (☎2810 741689; www.kazantzakis-museum.gr; adult/child €3/1; ☀9am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Feb). In a modern building overlooking the *kafeneio*-flanked central plaza, the aesthetically lit presentation zeroes in on the life, philosophy and accomplishments of Crete's most famous writer. Watch a short documentary, then nose around personal effects, movie posters, letters, photographs and other paraphernalia. Rooms upstairs present an overview of Kazantzakis' most famous works including, of course, *Zorba the Greek*.

i Getting There & Away

With parking at a premium in summer, it's best to visit Knossos by taking bus 2 from Iraklio's Bus Station A (€1.50, every 20 minutes). If you do drive, there's no shortage of signs directing you to the site.

Arhanes Αρχάνες

POP 3824

Arhanes, 14km south of Iraklio and lorded over by Mt Yiouhtas, is a restored village with a long history, important archaeological sites, interesting museums and excellent cafes and tavernas. The modern town sits atop a Minoan palace of which only a tiny section has been excavated. However, fans of Minoan ruins can indulge their passion at several other nearby sites: **Anemospilia**, a temple where evidence of human sacrifice was discovered; the vast necropolis of **Fourni**; and **Vathypetro**, a nobleman's villa with a Minoan wine press. Findings from these local sites, including coffins and an ornamental dagger, are displayed at the **Archaeological Museum of Arhanes** (admission free; ☀8.30am-2.30pm Wed-Mon) in town.

Nice places to stay include the apartments at **Eliathos** (☎2810 751818, 6951804929; www.eliathos.gr; studio €91, villas €130-182; 🍷🍷), whose owner offers Cretan cooking classes and olive oil-, *raki* (Cretan fire-water)- and wine-making workshops.

There are plenty of good tavernas around the main square, but for a special treat head to nearby **Kritamon** (☎2810 753092; www.kritamon.gr; mains €9-14; ☀dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun) which creates soulful salads, rustic mains and to-die-for desserts from ancient recipes with ingredients from the family garden or local suppliers.

On weekdays, there's hourly bus service from Iraklio (€1.70, 30 minutes) but weekend service is sparse. For more info, visit www.archanes.gr.

Zaros Ζαρός

POP 3370

In the foothills of Mt Psiloritis some 46km southwest of Iraklio, the rustic mountain village of Zaros is famous for its natural spring water, which is bottled and sold all over Crete. Nearby excavations indicate that the steady supply of water lured Minoans, and later Romans, to settle here. Sightseeing highlights include the Byzantine monasteries of **Moni Vrontisi**, noted for its 15th-century Venetian fountain and 14th-century frescoes, as well as **Moni Agios Nikolaos**, also with frescoes, at the mouth of the stunning **Rouvas Gorge**. A hike through the gorge leads to the protected Rouvas Forest with Crete's oldest oak trees.

Just northeast of Zaros, the emerald-green **Lake Votomos** has a children's playground and an excellent taverna-cafe, **I Limni** (trout per kg €22; ☀9am-late). From the lake, a path accesses both Moni Agios Nikolaos (1km) and the Rouvas Gorge (2.5km).

For overnights, **Eleonas** (☎28940 31238, 6976670002; www.eleonas.gr; r incl breakfast €60-120; 🍷🍷🍷) is an attractive retreat built into a terraced hillside. In town, **Vengera** (mains €4-6) serves home-cooked traditional Cretan food.

Buses from Iraklio stop in Zaros twice daily (once on Sunday) en route to Kamares (€4.70; one hour).

Matala Μάταλα

POP 101

Matala (*ma-ta-la*), on the south coast 11km southwest of Phaestos, was a groovy getaway in the early 1970s. Scores of hippies invaded and took up rent-free residence in cliffside caves that date back to neolithic times and were used as tombs by the Romans. Joni Mitchell famously immortalised the era in

her song 'Carey'. Today, little of the 'peace and love' spirit is left, especially during summer when scores of day trippers flock here to enjoy the seaside tavernas and shop at the plethora of souvenir stands.

Visit in the off-season, though, and it's still possible to discern the Matala magic. The setting along a crescent-shaped bay flanked by headlands is simply spectacular. The water is clear and sunset views of the offshore Paximadia islands can be achingly beautiful. Matala also makes a convenient base for visiting Phaestos and Agia Triada.

Sleeping & Eating

The street running perpendicular to the main drag is lined with budget and mid-range accommodation.

Matala Valley Village RESORT €
(☎28920 45776; www.valleyvillage.gr; d/bungalow €48/76; ☀May-Oct; ♿♿♿) This family-friendly garden resort consists of low-lying buildings with fairly basic rooms and 23 spiffier whitewashed bungalows with jacuzzi and separate shower. Frolicking grounds include a lawn, small playground and big pool.

Hotel Nikos HOTEL €
(☎28920 45375; www.matala-nikos.com; r incl breakfast €40-45; ♿♿) The best property on the hotel strip, Nikos has 17 rooms on two floors flanking a flower-filled courtyard. The owners, Matala-born Nikos and Panagiota, are happy to share insider tips about the area with their guests.

Gianni's GREEK €
(mains €7-13.50) A refreshing change from the run-of-the-mill waterfront tavernas, this been-there-forever family place just past the central square makes no-nonsense Greek food, including an excellent mixed grill with salad and potatoes.

Scala Fish Tavern SEAFOOD, GREEK €€
(mains €7-14, fish per kg €35; ☀8am-late) Past all the bars, this modern-looking place gets top marks for its fresh fish, superior service and romantic sunset views of the caves.

Lions GREEK €
(mains €6-9) Overlooking the beach, Lions has been popular for many years and has above-average food. It gets buzzy in the evening, making it a good place to wind down the day with a drink.

Getting There & Away

There are four buses daily (one on Sunday) to/from Iraklio (€7.80, two hours) and Phaestos (€1.70, 30 minutes). Park for free along the road into town or pay €2 in the beach parking lot.

Rethymno Ρέθυμνο

POP 28,850

Basking between the commanding bastions of its 15th-century fortress and the glittering azure waters of the Med, Rethymno (*reth-im-no*) is one of Crete's most delightful towns. Its Venetian-Ottoman quarter is a lyrical maze of lanes draped in floral canopies and punctuated by graceful wood-

DON'T MISS

GORTYNA

If you're visiting Phaestos and Agia Triada, build in a stop in nearby **Gortyna** (Γόρτυνα; ☎28920 31144; adult/concession/under 18 & EC students €4/2/free; ☀8.30am-8pm Jul & Aug, shorter hr rest of year), which was once a subject town of powerful Phaestos but later became the capital of Roman Crete. At its peak, as many as 100,000 people may have milled around its streets.

There are two sections to Gortyna, with the best preserved relics in the fenced area on the north side of the road. These include the 6th-century Byzantine **Church of Agios Titos**, the finest early Christian church in Crete and, even more importantly, the massive stone tablets inscribed with the 6th-century-BC **Laws of Gortyna**, the oldest law code in the Greek world. Most of the major Roman structures are spread over a vast area south of the highway and are therefore not as easy to locate. Look for road signs pointing to the **Temple of Apollo**, the main sanctuary of pre-Roman Gortyna. East of here is the 2nd-century-AD **Praetorium**, once residence of the provincial Roman governor, a **Nymphaeum** (public bath) and an amphitheatre.

Gortyna is 46km southwest of Iraklio and 15km from Phaestos. Buses to Phaestos from Iraklio also stop at Gortyna.

MUSEUM OF CRETAN ETHNOLOGY

This outstanding **museum** (☎28920 91112/0; admission €3; ☀10am-6pm Apr-Oct, by appointment in winter) in the village of Vori, just north of Agia Triada and Phaestos, provides fascinating insight into traditional Cretan culture. The English-labelled exhibits are organised around such themes as rural life, food production, war, customs, architecture and music. Although most of the items are rather ordinary – hoes, olive presses, baskets, clothing, instruments etc – they're all engagingly displayed in darkened rooms accented with spotlights. This is the best museum of its kind on the island and absolutely worth a detour. It's well signposted from the main Mires–Tymbaki road.

balconied houses and ornate monuments; minarets add an exotic flourish. While architectural similarities invite comparison to Hania, Rethymno has a character all its own, thanks in large part to a sizeable student population. Crete's third-largest town has lively nightlife, some excellent restaurants and even a decent beach right in town. The busier beaches, with their requisite resorts, stretch almost without interruption all the way to Panormo, some 22km east.

History

Modern Rethymno has been settled since Minoan times. Around the 4th century BC, it emerged as an autonomous state of sufficient stature to issue its own coinage. It waned in importance during Roman and Byzantine times but flourished again under Venetian rule; many of today's most important buildings date from that period. The Ottomans ruled until 1897 when Russia became overseer of Rethymno during the European Great Powers' occupation. The town's reputation as an artistic and intellectual centre grew from 1923, when the mandated population exchanges between Greece and Turkey brought many refugees from Constantinople.

👁️ Sights

Rethymno is fairly compact, with most sights, accommodation and tavernas wedged within the largely pedestrianised Old Quarter off the Venetian harbour. The beach is east of the harbour, flanked by a busy strip of bars and cafes along Eleftheriou Venizelou. Running parallel one block inland, Arkadiou is the main shopping street.

Venetian Fortress

FORTRESS

(Paleokastro Hill; adult/senior/family €4/3/10; ☀8am-3pm Jun-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-May) Lording it over the Old Quarter is Rethymno's 16th-century fortress built in reaction to multiple pirate raids and the mounting threat from

the Turks. Although its massive walls once sheltered numerous buildings, only a church and a mosque survive. Nevertheless, there are many ruins to explore and great views from the ramparts. Enter via the eastern gate.

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/concession €3/2; ☀8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) Near the fortress entrance in the old Turkish prison, this small museum displays excavated regional treasures from neolithic to Roman times, including bronze tools, Minoan pottery, Mycenaean figurines, Roman oil lamps and a 1st-century-AD sculpture of Aphrodite.

Old Quarter

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Pride of place among Rethymno's many Venetian vestiges goes to the **Rimondi Fountain** (cnr Paleologou & Petihaki Sq), with its spouting lion heads and Corinthian capitals, and the nearby **Loggia**, which was once a meeting house for nobility and is now a gift shop. South of here, the **Porta Guora** (Great Gate; cnr Ethnikis Antistaseos & Dimakopoulou) is the only remnant of the Venetian defensive wall.

Among the few remaining Ottoman structures, the most important is the triple-domed **Neratzes Mosque** (Vernardou), which was converted from a Franciscan church in 1657 and is now used as a music conservatory and concert venue.

On the same street, the five-room **Historical & Folk Art Museum** (Vernardou 26-28; adult/student €4/2; ☀9.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat), in a lovely Venetian mansion, documents traditional rural life with displays of clothing, baskets, weavings and farming tools.



Activities

Dolphin Cruises

BOAT TRIPS

(☎28310 57666; Venetian Harbour; www.dolphin-cruises.com; cruises €15-35) Dolphin runs boat trips to pirate caves, day cruises to Bali and fishing trips.

Happy Walker

(☎28310 52920; www.happywalker.com; Tombazi 56; walks from €30; ☀5-8.30pm daily, closed Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) Happy Walker runs tours through gorges, along ancient shepherd trails and to traditional villages in the lush hinterland.

HIKING

★ Festivals & Events

Carnival

CARNIVAL

(http://carnival-in-rethymnon-greece.com) Rethymno is famous for its pre-Lent celebrations: four weeks of dancing and masquerading, games and treasure hunts, and a grand street parade in February or March.

Renaissance Festival

MUSIC

(www.rfr.gr) For two weeks in July, this festival celebrates Rethymno's Venetian heyday with top-flight concerts held in the fortress' Erofilis Theatre and in the Neratzes Mosque.

Sleeping

Hotel Veneto

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28310 56634; www.veneto.gr; Epimenidou 4; studio/ste €125/145; 📶📶) This charmer personifies everything Rethymno has to offer: history, beauty, art and great food. Soak up the vibe in 10 rooms that mix polished wood floors and ceilings with such mod cons as satellite TV and kitchenettes. Note the stunning pebble mosaic in the foyer. Optional breakfast is €8.

Vetera Suites

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28310 23844, 6972051691; www.vetera.gr; Kastriogiannaki 39; r €130-150; 📶📶) A gorgeous option, this four-suite gem drips with character and attention to detail, from the lace curtains to the handpicked antique furniture and neatly concealed kitchenettes. DVD players and wi-fi lend a modern touch. Optional breakfast is €10.

Rethymno



Avli Lounge Apartments BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€
(☎28310 58250; www.avli.gr; Xanthoudidou 22, cnr Radamanthos; r incl breakfast €189-263; 🏠🚿) Luxury is taken very seriously at this private retreat where you'll be ensconced in warmly furnished studios sporting stone walls, beamed ceilings and jacuzzi. Retire to plush beds after a first-rate dinner in Avli's romantic courtyard garden restaurant.

Atelier PENSION €
(☎28310 24440; http://frosso-bora.com; Himaras 25; d €45-55; 🏠🚿) With their exposed stone walls and Venetian architectural features, these four rooms attached to a pottery workshop near the fortress are our top budget pick. Both are run by the local ceramic artist Frosso Bora.

Palazzo Rimondi BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€
(☎28310 51289; www.palazzorimondi.com; Xanthoudidou 21; ste incl breakfast €145-290; 🏠🚿) Many of the 20 studios (with kitchenettes) in this scrumptious Venetian mansion incorporate features such the original domes and stone arches. There's a small splash pool in the courtyard where days start with an extensive breakfast buffet.

Casa dei Delfini PENSION €€
(☎28310 55120, 6937254857; www.rethymno.holidays.gr; Nikiforou Foka 66-68; studios €60-65,

maisonette €95-110; 🏠🚿) The four rooms in this elegant guesthouse sit around a small courtyard with a dolphin mosaic. Each has unique features, such as a *hammam* (Turkish bath) in the bathroom or a bed tucked into an arched stone alcove. All have kitchenettes. For extra room, book the two-story maisonette which has a large private terrace.

Casa Vitae BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€
(☎28310 35058; www.casa-vitae.gr; Neophytou Patealarou; r €80-135; 🏠🚿) This charismatic Venetian-era hotel has eight quietly elegant rooms mixing stone and wood and wrapping around a courtyard where breakfast is served beneath the vine-covered pergola. Romance rules in the larger suites with iron four-poster beds, jacuzzi and a private terrace.

Rethymno Youth Hostel HOSTEL €
(☎28310 22848; www.yhrethymno.com; Tombazi 41; dm with shared bathroom €11; 🚿) Friendly and well run, this hostel has a communal patio conducive to striking up friendships. Breakfast and snacks are available and there's a bar in the evening. The reception is staffed from 8am to noon and 5pm to 9pm. If you arrive after 9pm, find a free bed and pay in the morning.

Rethymno

📍 Top Sights

- Archaeological Museum B1
- Venetian Fortress A1

📍 Sights

- 1 Entrance to Fortress A1
- 2 Historical & Folk Art Museum B3
- 3 Loggia C2
- 4 Neratzes Mosque B3
- 5 Porta Guora B4
- 6 Rimondi Fountain B2

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 7 Dolphin Cruises C2
- 8 Happy Walker C4

📍 Sleeping

- 9 Atelier B1
- Avli Lounge Apartments (see 17)
- 10 Byzantine Hotel B4
- 11 Casa dei Delfini A3
- 12 Casa Vitae A3

- 13 Hotel Veneto B2
- 14 Palazzo Rimondi B2
- 15 Rethymno Youth Hostel B4
- 16 Vetera Suites C4

🍴 Eating

- 17 Avli B2
- 18 En Plo B1
- 19 Lemonokipos B3
- 20 Samaria D4
- 21 Taverna Knossos C2
- 22 Thalassografia B1
- Veneto (see 13)

🍷 Drinking

- 23 Ali Vafi's Garden B4
- 24 Fusion Enoteca B2
- 25 Living Room D4

🛍 Shopping

- 26 Ilias Spondidakis C3
- 27 Mediterraneo B2
- 28 Xenos Typos B4

Byzantine Hotel

HOTEL €€
 (☎28310 55609; www.byzantinehotel.gr; Vosporou 26; d incl breakfast €60; 🍷) This nine-room hotel in a historic building near the Porta Guorra maintains a traditional feel. The darkish and simply decorated rooms sport carved timber furniture and some big bathrooms with tubs. The back rooms overlook an old mosque and minaret.

**Eating**

The setting is magical, but with few exceptions, the tourist-gearred tavernas in the Venetian harbour are mediocre at best. Head to the Old Quarter for better options.

**Avli**

CRETAN €€
 (☎28310 58250; www.avli.com; Xanthoudidou 22, cnr Radamanthos; mains €13.50-30). This Venetian garden villa serves modern Cretan food with a side of romance. Farm-fresh fare steers the menu that may include lamb with wild mountain greens in lemon sauce or goat with honey and thyme, all punctiliously prepared and beautifully presented.

En Plo

GREEK €€
 (Kefalogiannidon 28; mezedhes €5.50-9) Our favourite waterfront taverna, En Plo kicks Greek and Cretan comfort food up a notch or two. Mountain greens get a tangy twist with tamarind dressing, plump *bacalao* (salt cod) is paired with a feisty garlic sauce, and the feta *saganaki* (fried cheese) snug-gles up to caramelised figs. Sit in the arty interior or snag a table next to the waves.

Veneto

CRETAN €€
 (☎28310 56634; www.restaurantveneto.gr; Epimenidou 4; mains €9-18; ☺May-Oct) In the eponymous boutique hotel, Veneto oozes historic charm from every nook and cranny. The owner is a wine buff, while the kitchen pushes flavour boundaries with old Cretan and Greek recipes, usually with superb results.

Lemonokipos

CRETAN €€
 (www.lemontreegarden.com; Ethnikis Antistaseos 100; mains €6-21) Candles, wine and a table for two in an enchanted courtyard are the hallmarks of a romantic night out. But even if your date doesn't make you swoon, the creative Cretan classics served beneath the lemon trees should still ensure an unforgettable evening.

Taverna Knossos

GREEK €
 (www.knosos-rethymno.com; Old Venetian Harbour; mains €6-12; set menu for 2 €30) Most tout-

fronted tavernas in the Venetian harbour focus more on the ambience than on the quality of the food. Owned by the Stavroulaki family for half a century, Knossos is a happy exception. The fish is outstanding and the service swift and gracious.

Thalassografia

GREEK €
 (☎28310 52569; Kefalogiannidon 33; mains €6.50-13.50) This casual alfresco cafe has a breathtaking cliffside setting with enviable views of the fortress and the sea. The grilled sardines are excellent, as are the stuffed mushrooms, all best washed down with the organic local Brink's beer.

Samaria

GREEK €
 (Eleftheriou Venizelou 39-40; dishes €4-8.50; ☺24hr) Along this busy cafe and restaurant strip, this is one of the few eateries where you'll see local families feasting on classic Greek feel-good food, including excellent soups and grilled meats.

**Drinking**

The main bar and cafe strip is along Eleftheriou Venizelou and popular with both students and tourists. Another buzzy cluster is around the Rimondi Fountain, while the Old Quarter's side streets have quieter places. Most open around 9am or 10am, operating as cafes in the daytime and as bars when the moon rises.

**Ali Vafi's Garden**

CAFE, BAR
 (Izane Bouniali 65a) Choice pieces by the ceramic-artist owners decorate the stone-vaulted front room of this watering hole, but in summer there are few locations more enchanting than the garden behind their on-site pottery workshop.

Living Room

LOUNGE BAR
 (www.living.com.gr; Eleftheriou Venizelou 5) The sleekest and slickest bar on the waterfront strip wows with its eclectic decor (big mirrors, velvet chairs, stylish lamps) and is always abuzz with Rethymno's young and restless.

Fusion Enoteca

WINE BAR
 (Xanthoudidou 22, cnr Radamanthos) Owned by the same team as the Avli Restaurant, this handsome wine shop-cum-bar is chock-full with over 450 hand-selected labels. If you feel like stronger stuff, hop across the street to the affiliated **Raki Baraki** bar, which often has live music.



Shopping

For English books, travel guides, international periodicals and maps, try the following:

Ilias Spondidakis (Souliou 43)

Mediterraneo (Mavrokordatou 2)

Xenos Typos (Ethnikis Antistaseos 21)



Information

There are free public wi-fi hotspots at the town hall, Plateia Iroon, the Venetian harbour and the Municipal Garden, all within the old town.

Cybernet (Kallergi 44-46; per hr €2.50; ☎9.30am-3am)

Hospital (☎28210 27491; Triandalydou 17; ☎24hr)

Internet Cafe (Eleftheriou Venizelou 40; per hr €2, wi-fi free; ☎24hr)

National Bank (cnr Demokratias & Gerakari) Next to the town hall.

Post office (Moatsou 21; ☎7am-7pm Mon-Fri)

Regional tourist office (☎28310 25571; www.rethymnon.gr; Demokratias 1; ☎8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist police (☎28310 28156/54340)



Getting There & Away

Bus

Buses leave from the terminal at Igoumenou Gavriil, about 600m west of the Porta Guora. Services are reduced at weekends and outside the peak season. For specific timetables, consult www.bus-service-crete-ktel.com.

BUS SERVICES FROM RETHYMNO

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Agia Galini	1½hr	€6.50	up to 5 daily
Anogia	1¼hr	€5.50	2 Mon-Fri
Hania	1hr	€6.20	hourly
Hora Sfakion	2hr	€7.30	1 daily
Iraklio	1½hr	€7.60	hourly
Moni Arkadiou	40min	€2.80	up to 3 daily
Omalos (Samaria Gorge)	1¼hr	€15	3 daily
Plakias	1hr	€4.50	up to 5 daily
Preveli	1¼hr	€4.50	2 daily



Getting Around

Auto Motor Sports (☎28310 24858; www.auto-motosport.com.gr; Sofoklis Venizelou 48) rents cars and motorbikes.

Moni Arkadiou Μονή Αρκαδίου

The 16th-century **Moni Arkadiou** (Arkadi Monastery; ☎28310 83136; www.arkadimonastery.gr; admission €2.50; ☎9am-8pm Jun-Sep, shorter hr rest of year), some 23km southeast of Rethymno, has deep significance for Cretans. It's a stark and potent symbol of human resistance and considered a spark plug in the struggle towards freedom from Turkish occupation.

In November 1866 massive Ottoman forces arrived to crush island-wide revolts. Hundreds of Cretan men, women and children fled their villages to find shelter at Arkadiou. However, far from being a safe haven, the monastery was soon besieged by 2000 Turkish soldiers. Rather than surrender, Cretans set light to stored gunpowder kegs, killing everyone, Turks included. One small girl miraculously survived and lived to a ripe old age in a village nearby. A bust of this woman and another of the abbot who lit the gunpowder are outside the monastery not far from the old windmill, which is now a macabre **ossuary** with skulls and bones of the 1866 victims neatly arranged in a glass cabinet.

Arkadiou's most impressive building is its Venetian **church** (1587), which has a striking Renaissance facade marked by eight slender Corinthian columns and topped by an ornate triple-belled tower. There's a small museum left of here and the old wine cellar where the gunpowder was stored at the end of the left wing.

There are three buses daily (two on weekends) from Rethymno to the monastery (€2.80, 40 minutes).

Anogia Ανώγεια

POP 2125

Anogia presides over the so-called Devil's Triangle of macho mountain villages that occasionally get involved in armed stand-offs with the police (usually over illicit cannabis cultivation, but sometimes just due to perceived affronts to local honour). Perched aside **Mt Psiloritis**, 37km southwest of Iraklio, Anogia is known for its rebellious spirit and determination to express its undiluted Cretan character. Its famous 2000-guest weddings involve the entire village. It's also famous for its stirring music and has spawned many of Crete's best known musicians.

During WWII, Anogia was a centre of resistance and suffered heavily for it. The

A MODEL FARM

Embedded in the rolling hills near the village of Adele, about 13km east of Rethymno, **Agreco Farm** (☎28310 72129, 6947275814; www.agreco.gr; tour & lunch or dinner €30; 🕒11am-10pm Tue-Sat May-Oct) is a replica of a 17th-century estate and a showcase of centuries-old organic and eco-friendly farming practices. The brainchild of the Daskalantonakis family, owners of the Grecotel hotel chain, it uses mostly traditional machinery, including a donkey-driven olive press, a flour watermill, a wine press and a giant vat for grape crushing.

The farm is usually open from May to October except when private events, such as weddings or baptisms, keep it closed to the public. Normally though, there are several ways to experience this dreamy place. **Farm tours** start at 6pm and culminate in a 30-course Cretan feast in the taverna, which was named Best Organic Restaurant by *Vanity Fair* in 2009. Most of the dishes are prepared with produce, dairy and meat grown right here on the farm. If you're more the hands-on type, swing by on Sunday at 11am when visitors are invited to participate in **traditional agricultural activities**. Depending on the time of year, you could find yourself shearing a sheep, milking a goat, making cheese or smashing grapes (see the website for the schedule). This is followed by a buffet-style **Harvest Festival Lunch**. Reservations are essential for the farm tour and the Sunday experience.

If you're just stopping by during the day, you can enjoy snacks and drinks at the **kafeneio** (coffee house) and stock up on farm-grown products at the shop. Do call ahead, though, to make sure they're open.

Nazis burned down the town and massacred all the men in retaliation for their role in sheltering Allied troops and aiding in the kidnapping of a Nazi general.

Hence, most of the buildings you see today are actually of relatively recent vintage, yet Anogia seems to desperately cling to time-honoured traditions. Black-shirted moustachioed men lounge in the *kafeneia*, baggy pants tucked into black boots, while elderly women hunch over their canes, aggressively flogging woven blankets and embroidered textiles displayed in their shops.

Anogia clings to a hillside, with the tourist shops in the lower half and most accommodation and businesses above.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Aristeia HOTEL €
(☎28340 31459; d incl breakfast €40, apt €50-90)
There are good valley views in no-nonsense rooms with TV, private bathrooms and balconies. For more space and comfort, spend a little extra for a modern apartment next door; some sleep up to six people.

Ta Skalomata CRETAN €
(☎28340 31316; mains €4-9) In the upper village, Skalomata has provided sustenance to locals and travellers for about 40 years with great grilled meats (the roast lamb is especially good), homemade wine and bread,

and such tasty meatless options as zucchini with cheese and eggplant.

Getting There & Away

There are up to three buses daily from Iraklio (€3.80, one hour) and two buses Monday to Friday from Rethymno (€5.50, 1¼ hours).

Mt Psiloritis Όρος Ψηλορείτης

Imposing Mt Psiloritis, also known as Mt Idi, soars skyward for 2456m, making it Crete's highest mountain. At its eastern base is the **Nida Plateau** (1400m) a wide, fertile expanse reached via a paved 21km-long road from Anogia past several *mitata* (round, stone shepherd's huts). It culminates at a huge parking lot where a simple taverna offers refreshment and spartan rooms (€25). It gets chilly up here, even in summer, so bring a sweater or light jacket.

About 1km before road's end, an asphalt spur veers off to the left, ending after about 3km at the **Skinakas Observatory** (www.skinakas.org.gr), Greece's most significant stargazing vantage point. The observatory opens to the public once a month during the full moon from May to September, between 5pm and 11pm (English-speaking guides in July and August only). The website has details.

The mountain's most important feature is the **Ideon Cave** – the place where, according to legend, the god Zeus was reared (although the Dikteon Cave in Lasithi makes the same claim). Ideon was a place of worship from the late 4th millennium BC onwards and many artefacts, including gold jewellery and a bronze shield, have been unearthed here. The cave itself is really just one huge and fairly featureless cavern about a 1km walk from the parking lot.

Back on the plateau itself, you can make out a sprawling landscape sculpture called **Andartis – Partisan of Peace** against the hills. Created by German artist Karina Raeck in 1991, it commemorates the Cretan resistance in WWII. The monument itself is a pile of local rocks arranged in such a way that it looks like an angel when seen from above. Ask the taverna staff to point it out if you can't spot it on your own. The walk out there is a little over 1km.

Spili Σπίλι

POP 698

About halfway between Rethymno and Agia Galini, Spili (*spee-lee*) makes a logical lunch stop on coast-to-coast trips. It's a pretty mountain village with cobbled streets, flowered balconies, vine-covered rustic houses and plane trees. Tourist buses stop here during the day, but in the evening Spili belongs to the locals. There's great hiking in the local mountains, while in town the main attraction is the restored **Venetian Fountain** that spurts water from 19 stone lion heads into a long trough. Fill up your own bottle with some of the island's best water.

Sleeping & Eating

Heracles

PENSION €

(☎28320 2211, 69736 67495; heraclespapadakis@hotmail.com; s/d €30/40; 🍷🍷) The five balconied rooms here are quiet, spotless and handily furnished, but it's Heracles himself who makes the place memorable. A geologist by profession, he's intimately familiar with the area and can put you on the right hiking trail, birdwatching site or hidden beach. Breakfasts start at €3.85.

TOP CHOICE Panorama

CRETAN €€

(mains €6-12; ☺ dinner daily, lunch Sun) Enjoy superb views from the terrace of this fine traditional taverna on the outskirts of Spili while munching on homemade bread, toothsome

mezedhes or such tempting mains as succulent kid goat with *horta* (mountain greens).

Yianni's

GREEK €

(mains €4-10) Past the Venetian Fountain this friendly taverna has a big roadside terrace, reliably good traditional cooking and a decent house red. Try the delicious rabbit in wine or the mountain snails.

Information

There are two ATMs and a post office on the main street. Some of the cafes near the fountain have wi-fi.

Getting There & Away

Spili is on the Rethymno–Agia Galini bus route, which has up to five services daily.

Plakias Πλακιάς

POP 186

Some things in Crete never change and Plakias is one of them. Set beside a long south-coast beach between two immense wind tunnels – the gorges of Selia and Kourtaliotiko – this unassuming resort is enlivened by Central European package tourists and the international legions quartered at the popular youth hostel.

Plakias has plenty of good restaurants, accommodation and walks through olive groves and along seaside cliffs, some leading to sparkling hidden beaches. It's also an excellent base for regional excursions. Plakias' massive summertime wind has thankfully preserved it from overdevelopment.

Activities

In summer, **Baradakis Lefteris** (☎6936 806635; smernabar@gmail.com), owner of the Smerna Bar, runs boat trips to Preveli Beach, Loutro and Gavdos Island.

Diving is popular here, with two operators running shore and boat dives. The in-town one is Dutch-run **Dive 2gether** (☎28320 32313, 6974031441; www.dive2gether.com; ☀8.30am-8pm Apr-Oct).

There are also lovely **walking paths** to the scenic villages of Selia and Lefkogia and along the Kourtaliotiko Gorge to Moni Preveli. An easy 30-minute uphill path to Myrthios begins just before the youth hostel.

Sleeping

Accommodation becomes cheaper the further you go inland from the waterfront.

Along with a couple of resort-type hotels, simple pensions are plentiful.



Plakias Suites

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28320 31680, 6975811559; www.plakiasuites.com; studios €100; ☺Apr-Oct; ☹☹) Units at this stylish outpost within a whisker of the best stretch of local beach have modernist yet warm aesthetics and nifty touches such as large flat-screen TVs and mini hi-fis, rainforest showers and chic kitchens.

Plakias Youth Hostel

HOSTEL €

(☎28320 32118; www.yhplakias.com; dm €10; ☺Apr-Oct; ☹☹) Set around a lawn amid olive groves about 500m from the waterfront, this purposefully lazy hostel exudes an atmosphere of inclusiveness and good cheer that draws people of all ages and nationalities. Dorms have eight beds with fans but facilities are in a (well-kept) communal bathhouse. Inexpensive breakfast, water, wine, beer and soft drinks are available also. Book ahead if possible.

Gio-Ma

APARTMENTS €

(☎28320 32003; www.gioma.gr; apt €45; ☹☹) The studios and apartments at this family-run property are pretty straightforward in terms of comfort and amenities, but it's the central location and fabulous sea views, especially from the upper units, that give it an edge.

Morpheus

APARTMENTS €

(☎28320 31583, 6974654958; www.morpheus-apartments-plakias-crete-greece.com; r €45-60, apt €67-82; ☹☹) Modern rooms here have a generous layout, a full range of amenities (including a washing machine) and mountain or sea views. They're above a supermarket and across from the beach.



Eating

Taverna Christos

CRETAN €

(specials €5-13) This established taverna has a romantic tamarisk-shaded terrace next to the crashing waves and lots of interesting dishes you won't find everywhere, including home-smoked sea bass, black spaghetti with calamari and lamb *avgolemono* (lamb cooked in an egg-lemon stock) with fresh pasta.

Tasomanolis

SEAFOOD €

(mains €7-14; ☹) This traditional fish taverna on the western end of the beach is run by a keen fisherman. You can sample the day's catch on a nautical-themed waterfront terrace, grilled and paired with wild greens and wine.

Lisseos

GREEK €

(dishes €6-14.50; ☺dinner) This unfussy eatery by the bridge has excellent home-style cooking and fabulous chocolate cake.

Nikos Souvlaki

GREEK €

(mains €5-8; ☺dinner) A bare-bones joint and hostel-crowd favourite for cheap souvlaki and grilled chicken.



Drinking & Entertainment

Ostraco Bar

CAFE, LOUNGE BAR

(☺9am-late; ☹) This long-time favourite has a small upstairs bar where the gregarious gather for drinking and dancing. In the daytime, the waterfront lounge is great for chilling.

Joe's Bar

BAR

(☺9am-late) Sooner or later everyone seems to end up at Joe's, a dark, warehouselike joint that's officially called Nufaro and is right on the central waterfront. It plays a good selection of rock and pop and service is friendly.

Information

There are two ATMs on the central waterfront. The post office is on the first side street coming from the east. The mod cafe **Frame** (per hr €3; ☺10am-late), above the Forum shopping centre, has internet access. Several waterfront bars offer free wi-fi with purchase. Plakias also has a well-stocked, multi-language **lending library** (☺9.30am-12.30pm Sun, Mon & Wed, 5-7.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat) about 250m past the youth hostel.

Getting There & Away

In summer there are up to five buses daily to Rethymno (€4.50, one hour) and one to Preveli (€2.30, 30 minutes).

Getting Around

Cars Alianthos (☎28320 31851; www.alianthos.com) Reliable car-hire outlet.

Easy Ride (☎28320 20052; www.easyride.gr) Near the post office. Rents out mountain bikes, scooters and motorcycles.

Around Plakias

Plakias is an excellent base for local activities, ranging from walks and beach adventures to traditional village exploration.

Some 2.5km west of Plakias, **Souda** is an appealing sandy beach tucked within a lovely cove – often less windy than Plakias' main beach. Also nice but busier is **Damnoni Beach**, behind the eastern headland of

MYRTHIOS

The postcard-pretty village of Myrthios (Μύρθιος) draped across the hillside above Plakias makes for a quieter and more bucolic alternative to staying beachside. The other lure is a couple of excellent tavernas, both with bay-view terraces. Fairly swanky **Plateia** (☎28320 31560; mains €6-9) gives Greek standards a creative spin with results that should appeal to discerning palates, while more rustic **Taverna Panorama** (mains €4-11; ☎9am-late; 📺) gets jam-packed on Fridays when a Greek band strikes up traditional tunes. Myrthios is a short drive or 2km walk from Plakias.

Plakias Bay. Further on, **One-Rock Beach** is an idyllic, clothing-optional sandy cove. A coastal path across the headland now allows a circular **coastal walk**, offering stunning sea views.

MONI PREVELI ΜΟΝΗ ΠΡΕΒΕΛΗ

The historic **Moni Preveli** (☎28320 31246; www.preveli.org; admission €2.50; ☎8am-7pm mid-Mar-May, 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Jun-Oct) stands in splendid isolation high above the Libyan sea. Like most Cretan monasteries, it was a centre of anti-Ottoman resistance and was burned by the Turks during the 1866 onslaught.

After the Battle of Crete in WWII, many Allied soldiers were sheltered here before their evacuation to Egypt. A monument featuring two bronze sculptures of a gun-toting priest and a British soldier overlooking the cliffs commemorates the monastery's wartime role. The small **museum** contains a candelabrum presented by grateful British soldiers after the war, alongside valuable ecclesiastical objects. The church has some fine icons, some dating back to the 17th century.

In summer, there are two daily buses from Rethymno (€4.50, 1¼ hours) and one from Plakias (€2.30, 30 minutes).

Beaches Between Plakias & Agia Galini

PREVELI BEACH ΠΡΕΒΕΛΗ ΠΡΕΒΕΛΗ

Right below Moni Preveli, Preveli Beach (aka Palm Beach) is one of Crete's most celebrated strands. In August 2010 a massive fire swept through the canyon, burning the proud palm trees to a black crisp and seemingly dealing a major blow to the local tourism industry. But nature fought back with a vengeance and by the following summer most specimens had already sprouted new fronds.

The setting is truly stunning. The beach sits at the mouth of the Kourtaliotiko Gorge, from where the river Megalopotamos slices

across it before emptying into the Libyan sea. The palm-lined riverbanks have freshwater pools good for a dip, while rugged cliffs begin where the sand ends.

A steep path leads down to the beach (10 minutes) from a car park 1km before Moni Preveli. Alternatively, drive 5km along a signposted dirt road from a stone bridge and the excellent **Taverna Gefyra** off the Moni Preveli main road. It dead ends at **Amoudi Beach** from where Palm Beach is about a 1km walk over the headland.

TRIOPETRA ΤΡΙΟΠΕΤΡΑ

Triopetra is a big beach named after three giant rocks jutting out of the sea. A headland divides the sandy strip into 'Little Triopetra' and 'Big Triopetra'. The former is home to **Taverna Pavlos** (mains €5-12; ☎Apr-Oct), which specialises in fresh fish caught by the owner himself. The delicious salads and vegetable sides are prepared with home-grown organic produce. There are also a few simple but comfortable **rooms** (d/tr/q €36/40/45) that are often booked by participants in monthly yoga workshops.

Aside from (free) lounge chairs and umbrellas plus a small harbour where you can hire boats, there's really nothing here. Because of submerged sand shelves, Little Triopetra is not ideal for swimming, so head to the 'big' beach for that. There are two more tavernas with rooms along here.

Triopetra can be reached from Agios Pavlos (about 300m is drivable dirt road) or via a 12km winding asphalt road from the village of Akoumia on the Rethymno-Agia Galini road.

AGIOS PAVLOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΥΛΟΣ

Agios Pavlos is little more than a couple of small hotels and tavernas set around a picture-perfect sandy crescent cradled by rugged cliffs. In the distance you can make out the distinctive silhouette of Paximadia Island. The village claims to be the location from where Icarus and Daedalus took their

historic flight in ancient mythology (although nearby Agia Galini makes the same claim).

Despite its isolation, the main cove gets busy in July and August, but you can escape the bustle by heading for the beaches behind the headland to the west, which can only be reached by scrambling down a steep sand dune. The furthest cove is the least busy and popular with nudists. Agios Pavlos' beauty and tranquillity has made it a popular destination for yoga retreats organised by UK-based **Yoga Plus** (www.yogaplus.co.uk).

Agios Pavlos Hotel (☎28320 71104; www.agiospavloshotel.gr; d €28-40, apt €45-60; ☺Apr-Oct; 🚿) has waterfront rooms above its taverna and super-nice modern apartments up on the hill.

To get to Agios Pavlos, look for the turn-off to Kato Saktouria on the Rethymno–Agia Galini road and follow the winding asphalt down to the sea.

Agia Galini Αγία Γαλήνη

POP 855

East of Agios Pavlos, Agia Galini (a-ya gal-lee-nee) is an erstwhile picturesque fishing village where package tourism and over-development have diluted much of the original charm. With scores of ageing hotels and apartment buildings clinging to a steep hillside and hemmed in by cliffs, small beaches and a busy harbour, the town can feel claustrophobic in high season but definitely has its charms at other times.

Compared to the north coast resorts, though, Agia Galini is rather sedate, attracting mostly a middle-aged crowd, families and long-term expat residents; it's also a convenient base for visits to Phaestos, Agia Triada and the remote beaches west of here. The town all but shuts down in winter.

Sleeping

Palazzo Greco BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€ (☎28320 91187; www.palazzogreco.com; d with/without sea view €80/60; 📺🚿🚿🚿) Match your mood to the wall colour – green, blue or red – in fine-looking rooms with flat-screen TVs, fridges and circular marble sinks in the bathrooms. The top-floor two-bedroom suite (€160) sleeps up to seven.

Adonis HOTEL €€ (☎28320 91333; www.agia-galini.com; r €60, studio €60, apt €80-120; 🚿🚿🚿) It takes a healthy

ego to decorate the reception with a super-sized poster of oneself in strapping, hairy-chested 1970s glory. It also tells you that the proprietor is a bit of a character. Adonis still presides over his sprawling 75-room complex, with the nicest rooms being in the pool-adjacent newer building.

Camping No Problem CAMPGROUND € (☎28320 91386; campsite per person/tent/car/caravan €6/3/3/4; ☺all year; 📺🚿🚿) This well-maintained campground is about 100m from the beach and a 10-minute walk from the town centre. There's plenty of shade for pitching your tent, plus a huge pool, an excellent taverna (mains €4 to €13) and small supermarket.

Eating

Faros SEAFOOD € (Shopping St; mains €7-15) This no-frills family-run fish taverna is usually packed to the gills, and for good reason: the owner himself drops his nets into the Med, so you know what's on the plate that night was still swimming in the sea in the morning. Squid cooked in their own ink, lobster spaghetti and fish soup are specialties.

Taverna Stohos GREEK € (www.stohos.gr; Main Beach; mains €7-10; ☺late Apr-Oct) Locals swear by this beachfront taverna with attached apartments (doubles with breakfast €40 to €45). Friendly Fanourios presides over the kitchen which churns out excellent *kleftiko* (slow baked lamb or goat) and other clay-oven dishes.

Onar GREEK € (Food St; mains €6-12) There are plenty of other tavernas with romantic views over the port, but even after many years in business, Onar still hasn't lost its grip on the crowd. The tasty mezedhes and finger-lickin' grilled meats make it a stand-out option.

Information

Cafe Zanzibar, on the main street down near the port, has internet terminals and wi-fi. The post office and ATMs are nearby. For web information try www.agia-galini.com.

Getting There & Away

Buses stop in front of Cafe Zanzibar. In peak season there are up to six buses daily to Iraklio (€8, two hours), up to five to Rethymno (€6.20, 1½ hours) and Phaestos (€2.10, 30 minutes), and two to Matala (€3.30, 45 minutes).

WESTERN CRETE

The west of Crete stands apart in so many ways. It's full of big mountains, grandiose legends and memorials to great battles. It's presided over by the preening (but slightly melancholic) port city of Hania, once a jewel of a capital and full of arty boutique hotels, galleries and great eateries. But there's much more to the region: it boasts the grandest gorge in Europe, the continent's southernmost possession (tranquil Gavdos, a remote island nearer to Africa than Greece) and far-flung villages hardly affected by modernity. The steep mountains that ripple across the west and into the southern sea guarantee that the region generally remains untouched by the excesses of tourism.

Hania Xaviá

POP 53,838

Hania (hahn-*yah*; also spelt Chania) is Crete's most evocative city, with its pretty Venetian quarter, criss-crossed by narrow lanes, culminating at a magnificent harbour. Remnants of Venetian and Turkish architecture abound, with old townhouses now transformed into atmospheric restaurants and boutique hotels.

Although all this beauty means the Old Town is deluged with tourists in summer, it's still a great place to unwind. Excellent local handicrafts mean there's good shopping, too. Along Zambeliou, Theotokopoulou and Angelou streets, roofless Venetian buildings have been turned into outdoor restaurants. The Venetian harbour is a good place for a stroll and dotted with galleries and museums.

History

Minoan Kydonia occupied the hill east of Hania's harbour and was probably both a palace site and important town (as suggested by clay tablets with Linear B script discovered here). Although Kydonia was destroyed along with most other Minoan settlements in 1450 BC, it flourished throughout Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine times.

In the early 13th century Crete's new Venetian rulers renamed it La Canea. The massive fortifications they constructed were impressive but couldn't keep the Turks from invading, after a two-month siege, in 1645. When Ottoman rule ended in 1898, the European Great Powers made Hania Crete's capital; Iraklio replaced it only in 1971.

Sights

From Plateia 1866, the Venetian harbour is a short walk north up Halidon. Zambeliou, once Hania's main thoroughfare, is lined with craft shops, small hotels and tavernas. The slightly bohemian Splantzia quarter, running from Plateia 1821 between Daskalogianni and Halidon, has leafy restaurants and cafes, boutique hotels and traditional shopping. The headland near the lighthouse separates the Venetian harbour from the crowded town beach in the modern Nea Hora quarter.

Archaeological Museum MUSEUM

(Halidon 30; admission €2, incl Byzantine collection €3; ☺8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) This museum's collection of finds from western Crete spans from the neolithic to the Roman era and includes statues, vases, jewellery, floor mosaics and some impressive painted sarcophagi from a late-Minoan cemetery. It occupies the impressive 16th-century Venetian Church of San Francisco; outside, a Turkish fountain attests to its former incarnation as a mosque.

Naval Museum MUSEUM

(Akti Koundourioti; admission €3; ☺9am-7pm Mon-Fri, shorter hr Sat & Sun) A former Turkish prison is the backdrop for this interesting collection of model ships from the Bronze Age as well as naval instruments, paintings, photographs and memorabilia from the Battle of Crete.

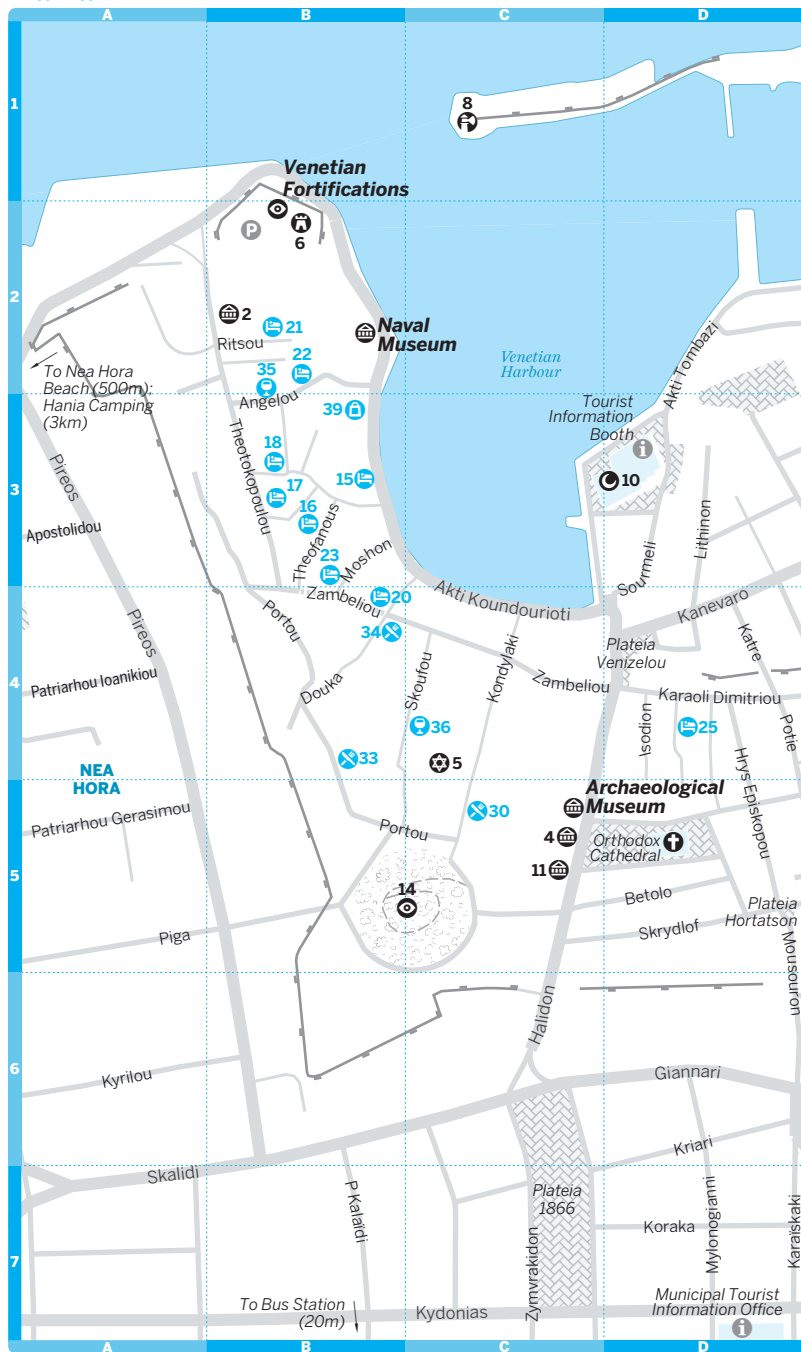
Venetian Fortifications FORTRESS

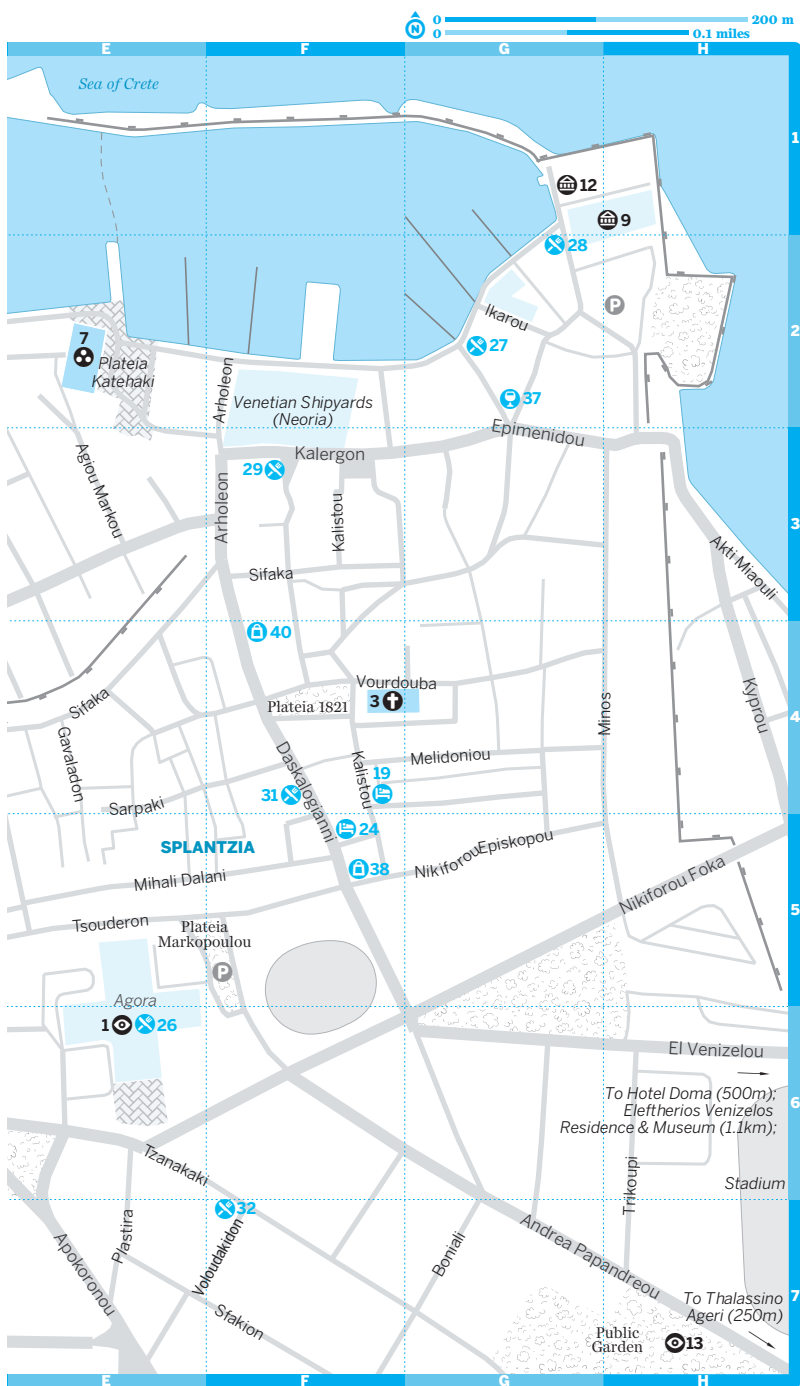
Part of a defensive system begun in 1538 by Michele Sanmichele, who also designed Iraklio's defences, Hania's massive fortifications remain impressive. Best preserved is the western wall, running from the **Firkas Fortress** to the **Siavo Bastion**. Entrance to the fortress is via the gates next to the Naval Museum. The bastion offers good views of the Old Town.

Church of Agios Nikolaos CHURCH

(Plateia 1821; ☺7am-noon & 4-7pm) One of Hania's few surviving minarets is attached to this church and juxtaposed with a bell-tower on the opposite end. Between the two a string of flags of Greece and Byzantium offer a cheery display of blues and yellows. Venetians laid the church foundations in 1205 and, about 125 years later, Franciscans most likely added the curving ceiling and stained-glass windows that bathe the interior in a kaleidoscope of colour in late afternoon. Ottomans turned the church into a mosque in 1645, but the Orthodox Church recovered it in 1918.

Hania





Hania

📍 Top Sights

Archaeological Museum	C5
Naval Museum	B2
Venetian Fortifications.....	B2

📍 Sights

1 Agora	E6
2 Byzantine & Post Byzantine Collection of Hania	B2
Centre for Mediterranean Architecture..... (see 7)	
3 Church of Agios Nikolaos	F4
4 Cretan House Folklore Museum	C5
5 Etz Hayyim Synagogue.....	C4
6 Firkas Fortress	B2
7 Great Arsenal	E2
8 Lighthouse	C1
9 Maritime Museum of Crete	H1
Minaret..... (see 3)	
10 Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan	D3
11 Municipal Art Gallery.....	C5
12 Neorio tou Moro.....	G1
13 Public Garden.....	H7
14 Siavo Bastion.....	C5

🛏 Sleeping

15 Amphora Hotel.....	B3
16 Casa Delfino.....	B3
17 Casa Leone	B3

18 Madonna Studios & Apartments	B3
19 Margot's House	F4
20 Nostos Hotel	B4
21 Pension Lena.....	B2
22 Pension Theresa.....	B2
23 Porto de Colombo.....	B3
24 Splanzia Hotel.....	F5
25 Vranas Studios	D4

🍷 Eating

26 Agora.....	E6
27 Apostolis I Taverna	G2
28 Apostolis II Taverna	G2
29 Doloma.....	F3
30 Ela.....	C5
31 Kouzina E.P.E.....	F4
32 Oasis	F7
33 Portes.....	B4
34 Tamam.....	B4

🍷 Drinking

35 Fagotto.....	B2
36 Synagogi.....	C4
37 Ta Duo Lux	G2

🛍 Shopping

Exantas Art Space..... (see 23)	
38 Giorgos Paterakis.....	F5
39 Mediterraneo	B3
40 Miden Agan	F4

Maritime Museum of Crete

MUSEUM
(Akti Defkalia; admission €2; ☎10am-2pm & 5-9pm) In the eastern section of the hulking arched Venetian Shipyards, this museum documents ancient and traditional ship-building through pictures and replicas, including an authentic copy of a Minoan ship.

🆓 Neorio tou Moro

ART GALLERY
(Akti Defkalia; ☎11am-2pm, 7-10pm) Just beyond the Maritime Museum, this is a hip new art gallery housed in another classic Venetian shipyard. At press time, a concert schedule was in the works.

Byzantine & Post Byzantine Collection of Hania

MUSEUM
(Theotokopoulou; admission €2, incl Archaeological Museum €3; ☎8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) In the fortress' restored Church of San Salvatore, this is a small but fascinating collection of artefacts, icons, jewellery and coins, includ-

ing a fine mosaic floor and a prized icon of St George slaying the dragon.

Cretan House Folklore Museum

MUSEUM
(Halidon 46; admission €2; ☎9.30am-3pm & 6-9pm) This interesting museum contains traditional crafts and implements, including weavings with traditional designs.

Eleftherios Venizelos

Residence & Museum

MUSEUM
(☎28210 56008; Plateia Helena Venizelou; admission €2; ☎10.30am-1.30pm daily & 6-8pm Mon-Fri) Some 1.5km east of the old town in the Haliepa neighbourhood, this building preserves the great statesman's home in splendid fashion, with original furnishings, maps and other memorabilia. Guided tours are available. Hours are reduced in winter.

Agora

MARKET
The central bastion of the city wall was demolished to make way for this magnificent municipal covered market that's worth a

visit even if you don't want to shop. If you do, it's a good source for take-home purchases such as spices, honey, olive oils and wines.

Other Attractions

The restored Venetian **lighthouse** at the entrance to the harbour is a 1.5km walk around the sea wall. On the inner harbour's eastern side, the prominent **Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan** (also called Mosque of Janissaries) holds regular art exhibitions. The well-restored Venetian **Great Arsenal** houses the **Centre for Mediterranean Architecture**, which hosts regular events and exhibitions. Similarly, Hania's **Municipal Art Gallery** (www.pinakothiki-kania.gr; Halidon 98; admission €2, Wed free; ☺10am-2pm & 7-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) hosts exhibitions of modern Greek art.

The restored **Etz Hayyim Synagogue** (Parodos Kondylaki; www.etz-hayyim-hania.org; ☺10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 5pm-8pm Sun, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon) has a moving memorial to the Jews of Hania who were annihilated by the Nazis.



Activities

Those looking for free information on all outdoor sports, including serious climbing in the Lefka Ori, mountain refuges and the E4 trail should first visit the Hania branch of EOS, the **Greek Mountaineering Association** (EOS; ☎28210 44647; www.eoshanion.gr; Zanakaki 90; ☺8.30am-10pm). EOS also runs regular weekend excursions.



Sleeping

Hania has many evocative digs, many of which close in the low season.



Hotel Doma

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 51772; www.hotel-doma.gr; Venizelos 124; s/d/tr/ste incl buffet breakfast €65/90/120/150; ☺Apr-Oct; 🏠🍷) One can imagine Hercule Poirot peering down the curving stairway at the Doma, a quiet, century-old classic overlooking the sea in the Halepa district. Decorated with period furnishings, this former consulate attracts couples, writers and solitude-seekers. Rooms are classy and well kept, and the flowering back garden is relaxing. Days start with tasty, all-natural breakfasts.

Splanzia Hotel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 45313; www.splanzia.com; Daskalogianni 20; d incl buffet breakfast €100; 🏠🍷) This smart designer hotel in an Ottoman building in the Splanzia quarter has eight stylish rooms, some decorated with four-poster timber beds

HANIA FOR CHILDREN

If your five-year-old isn't enthralled by Venetian architecture, head to the **public garden** between Zanakaki and Dimokratias, where there's a playground and a shady cafe. Eight kilometres south of town the giant water park **Limnoupolis** (☎28210 33246; Varypetro; day pass adult/child 6-12 €17/12, afternoon pass €12/9; ☺10am-7pm) has enough slides and rides to keep kids amused. Buses leave regularly from the bus station (€2.10).

and drapery. The back rooms overlook a lovely courtyard with cheerful bougainvillea and one of Hania's few remaining Turkish wells.

Casa Delfino

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎28210 87400; www.casadelfino.com; Theofanous 7; ste & apt incl buffet breakfast €180-340; 🏠🍷) This elegant 17th-century mansion is the most luxurious hotel in the Venetian quarter. The 24 individually decorated suites all have Italian marble baths, but those in the 'standard' category don't have balconies. For maximum pampering, treat yourself to a massage in the Turkish-inspired spa. Breakfast is in the splendid pebble-mosaic courtyard, and there are great sunset views from the rooftop terrace.

Porto de Colombo

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 70945; www.portodelcolombo.gr; Theofanous & Moshon; d/ste incl breakfast €85/110; 🏠) The former French embassy and office of Eleftherios Venizelos, this 600-year-old Venetian townhouse is now a charming boutique hotel with 10 lovely, well-appointed rooms; the top suites have fine harbour views. The standard rooms can fit up to three (though it's a bit snug), so for more elbow room get one of three self-catering apartments.

Amphora Hotel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 93224; www.amphora.gr; Parodos Theotokopoulou 20; s/ste €95/150, d with view €130; 🏠) Most of the elegantly decorated rooms at this immaculately restored Venetian mansion wrap around a courtyard, with a few more in a connected wing. Those on the top floors have harbour views, but front rooms can be noisy in the summer. Breakfast is €10.

Hania Camping

CAMPGROUND €

(☎28210 31138; www.camping-kania.gr; Agii Apostoli; campsite per caravan/tent €7/4; ☺Apr-Oct; 🏠)

Hania's nearest campground is 3km west of town on the beach with plenty of shade, a large pool, restaurant, bar and minimarket. Tent rentals are €10 and you can do laundry and get petrol here. Buses heading west (every 15 minutes) from the southeast corner of Plateia 1866 can drop you off.

Pension Lena

PENSION €

(☎28210 86860; www.lenachania.gr; Ritsou 5; s/d €35/55; ☹) Run by the friendly Lena, this pension near Nea Hora Beach has tastefully done rooms with an old-world feel and a scattering of antiques; the front rooms are the most appealing. The affiliated **Margot's House** in the relaxed Splantzia quarter can sleep up to six.

Casa Leone

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 76762; www.casa-leone.com; Parodos Theotokopoulou 18; ste incl breakfast €120-150; ☹☹) This Venetian residence has been converted into a classy and romantic family-run boutique hotel. The rooms are spacious and well appointed, with balconies overlooking the harbour. The honeymoon suites have drape-canopy beds and sumptuous curtains.

Pension Theresa

PENSION €

(☎28210 92798; www.pensiontheresa.gr; Angelou 2; r€40-50; ☹) Part of the Venetian fortifications, this creaky old house with a steep (and narrow!) spiral staircase and antique furniture delivers atmosphere aplenty. Some rooms have a view, but there's always the stunning vista from the rooftop terrace with a communal kitchen. Rooms are clean but fairly snug, though still a good bet for the price.

Vranas Studios

STUDIOS €

(☎28210 58618; www.vranas.gr; Agion Deka 10; studio €40-70; ☹) On a lively pedestrian street in the heart of the Old Town, this place has spacious, immaculately maintained studios with kitchenettes. All units have polished wooden floors, balconies, TVs and telephones, and there's an internet cafe next door.

Madonna Studios & Apartments

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28210 94747; madonnastudios@yahoo.co.uk; Gamba 33; studio €70-110; ☹☹) This charming small hotel has five attractive and traditionally furnished studios around a lovely flower-filled courtyard. The front top room has a superb balcony, while a courtyard room features the original stone wash trough. As with the other old-town properties, there can be street noise at night.

Nostos Hotel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28210 94743; www.nostos-hotel.com; Zambeliou 42-46; s/d/tr incl breakfast €65/103/133; ☹) Mixing Venetian style and modern fixtures, this 600-year-old building near the harbour and Firkas Fortress offers a dozen classy split-level units with kitchen, fridge, phone and TV. If you snag a balcony room, you'll enjoy harbour views. Nice roof garden, too.



Eating

Hania has some of the finest restaurants in Crete, often housed in roofless Venetian ruins. The prime-position waterfront tavernas tend to be mediocre, overpriced and fronted by annoying touts – plenty of better options await in the quieter back streets.



Portes

CRETAN €

(Portou 48; mains €6-9) Many locals agree that this is the best place in town for creative Cretan cooking with an international flourish. Menu stars include marinated *gavros* (little fish), wild snails and stuffed fish baked in paper, but you can't go wrong ordering whatever's on the specials board.

Thalassino Ageri

SEAFOOD €€€

(Vivilaki 35; fish per kg €55; ☺dinner) It can be tricky to find, but this fish taverna in a tiny port among the ruins of Hania's old tanneries is one of Crete's top eateries. The setting is superb, the fish fresh and the mezedhes mouth-watering. Top picks include tender octopus in wine vinegar, calamari and the fisherman's salad. Follow Venizelou around the shore, turning left at Noel St as soon as you veer away from the coast.

Kouzina E.P.E.

GREEK €

(Daskalogianni 25; mayirefta €3-7; ☺noon-8pm) This cheery, bright lunch spot in Splantzia is a local favourite away from the crowds, serving nourishing *mayirefta* and grilled meats. The playful name means 'Limited Liability Restaurant,' but there's no reason for concern – everything is great, from the sardines and *pastitsio* to the veal *stifadhó*.

Tamam

GREEK €€

(Zambeliou 49; mains €6-10) In a former *hammam*, Tamam offers Greek fare with an Ottoman flourish. There are plenty of superb vegetarian specialities (try the spicy avocado dip on potato) along with such Turkish-inspired dishes as the *tas kebap* (veal with spices and yoghurt) and the *beyendi* chicken with creamy aubergine purée.

Apostolis I & II

SEAFOOD €€

(Akti Enoseos; fish per kg from €40) In the quieter eastern harbour, this is a well-respected place for fresh fish and Cretan dishes served in two buildings. Apostolis II is more popular as the owner reigns there, but the other one has the same menu at marginally cheaper prices. A seafood platter for two, including salad, is €30.

Megeireion Peina Leon

GREEK €

(Venizelou 86; mezedhes €3-7; ☺10am-1am) This friendly place up in Halepa has great ambience, with big glass doors and original tiled floors. Meals are home-cooked and go well with the Cretan-produced organic lager beer.

Ela

CRETAN €

(Kondylaki 47; mains €8-16; ☺noon-1am) This 14th-century building has seen incarnations as a soap factory, school, distillery and cheese-processing plant. Now Ela serves up a decent array of Cretan specialities, such as goat with artichokes, while roving musicians create a lively ambience. The tacky board outside tells you it's in every guidebook, but the accolades are not undeserved.

Oasis

FAST FOOD €

(Vouloudakidon 2; souvlaki €2; ☺during shop hours Mon-Sat) Great souvlakia.

Agora

MARKET €

(☺8.30am-2pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm & 6-9pm Tue, Thu & Fri) Put together a picnic at Hania's famous covered market.

Doloma

GREEK €

(Kalergon 8; mayirefta €4.50-7; ☺Mon-Sat) Daily-prepared *mayirefta* in an unpretentious setting behind the harbour.

**Drinking & Entertainment****Synagogi**

BAR

(Skoufou 15) In a roofless Venetian building and former synagogue, this popular lounge is great for relaxing beneath the stone arches.

Fagotto

LIVE MUSIC

(Angelou 16; ☺7pm-2am Jul-May) This Hania institution in a Venetian building offers smooth jazz, soft rock and blues in a setting brimming with jazz paraphernalia, including a saxophone beer tap. It doesn't get busy until after 10pm.

Ta Duo Lux

BAR

(Sarpidona 8; ☺10am-late) Further along the harbour, this arty cafe-bar remains a per-

ennial favourite among wrinkle-free alternative types and is popular day and night. Nearby **Bororo** and **Hippopotamos** are also popular hang-outs.

**Shopping****Exantas Art Space**

SOUVENIRS

(Zambeliou & Moschon; ☺10am-2pm & 6pm-11pm) This classy store has great old photos, lithographs and engravings, handmade gifts, Cretan music and a good range of travel, coffee-table and art books.

Giorgos Paterakis

SHOES

(Episkopou Nikiforou 13) In a tiny shop in Splantzia, Giorgos is Hania's last maker of authentic Cretan leather boots. Local men typically don these knee-high creations at weddings, traditional dances and other special occasions, though shepherds too like their sturdy, waterproof nature.

Miden Agan

FOOD & DRINK

(www.midenaganshop.gr; Daskalogianni 70) Unique 'house' wine and liquors, along with over 800 Greek wines, are sold at this foodie haven, which also stocks such local gourmet delights as olive oil, honey and a homemade line of spoon sweets (try the white pumpkin).

Mediterraneo

BOOKS

(Akti Koundourioti 57) On the waterfront, this bookshop sells an extensive range of English-language novels and books on Crete, as well as international press.

**Information**

Free wi-fi is widely available in public spaces and most hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars. Banks cluster around Plateia Markopoulou in the new city, but there are also some ATMs in the Old Town on Halidon. For pre-trip research, try www.chania.gr or www.chania-guide.gr.

Hospital (☎28210 22000; Mournies) Some 5km south of town.

Municipal Tourist Office (☎28210 36155; tourism@chania.gr; Kydonias 29; ☺8am-2.30pm) At the town hall. There's also an info booth behind the mosque in the Venetian harbour that's usually staffed between noon and 2pm.

Post office (Peridou 10; ☺7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist police (☎28210 73333; Kydonias 29; ☺8am-2.30pm) By the town hall.

Triple W Internet (cnr Valadinon & Halidon; per hr €2; ☺24hr)

i Getting There & Away

Air

Hania's airport is 14km east of town on the Akrotiri Peninsula.

Boat

Hania's main port is situated at Souda, 7km southeast of town and the site of a NATO base. At press time, the only ferry service was to Piraeus. There are buses to Hania (€1.65) as well as taxis (€9).

Bus

Hania's bus station is on Kydonias, two blocks southwest of Plateia 1866, from where the Venetian harbour is a short walk north up Halidon. There's a left-luggage service (per day, per piece €1.50). The table lists peak season services. For details, see bus-service-crete-ktel.com.

BUS SERVICES FROM HANIA

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Elafonisi	2½hr	€11	1 daily
Falasarma	1½hr	€7.60	3 daily
Hora Sfakion	1hr 40min	€7.60	3 daily
Iraklio	2¾hr	€13.80	half-hourly
Kissamos-Kastelli	1hr	€4.70	13 daily
Omalos (for Samaria Gorge)	1hr	€6.90	3 daily
Paleohora	1hr 50min	€7.60	4 daily
Rethymno	1hr	€6.20	half-hourly
Sougia	1hr 50min	€7.10	2 daily
Stavros	30min	€2.10	3 daily

i Getting Around

To/From the Airport

From Hania bus station, there are at least three buses per day to the airport (€2.30, 20 minutes); check the schedule locally. A taxi to or from the airport costs €20 (plus €2 per bag).

Bus

Buses for the western beaches leave from the main bus station on Plateia 1866. Local buses also congregate around Plateia Markopoulou and offer quick service to such suburbs as Halépa. Buy tickets (€1.10) from the coin-operated machine at the bus stop.

Car

Most of the Old Town is pedestrianised. The best place to park is in the free lot near the Firkas Fortress (turn right off Skalidi at the sign to the big supermarket car park on Pireos and follow the road down to the waterfront).

Car hire agencies include the following:

Europrent (☎28210 27810; Halidon 87)

Tellus Travel (☎28210 91500; www.tellus-travel.gr; Halidon 108)

Around Hania

AKROTIRI PENINSULA ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙ

The Akrotiri Peninsula, to the northeast of Hania, is a barren, hilly stretch of rock covered with scrub. It has a few coastal resorts, Hania's airport and a massive NATO naval base on Souda Bay. Buses travel out here, but if you're driving, the poorly signposted roads can make it a difficult region to explore. Near Akrotiri's northern tip, sandy **Stavros Beach** is good for a dip and is famous as the backdrop for the final dancing scene in *Zorba the Greek*. Five buses Monday to Friday and three on Sunday travel out to Stavros (€2.10, 30 minutes).

SOUTH TO THE SAMARIA GORGE

About 14km south of Hania, a scenic road (via Perivolía) leads to **Theriso**, famous for its connection with Eleftherios Venizelos and the late-19th-century revolutionary period in Crete. The spectacular drive follows a running stream through a green oasis and the 6km-long Theriso Gorge. At the foot of the Lefka Ori Mountains, the village was the site of historical battles against the Turks. These days it is popular for its fine tavernas that host marathon Sunday lunches. Two tavernas vie for top billing. **O Leventis** has a lovely courtyard under a giant canopy of plane trees and makes a delicious and sizeable *kreatotourta* (local meat pie), while **O Antartis** also has excellent mezedhes and Cretan mains.

From Theriso, continue through orange groves to Fournes, where you fork left to Meskla. The main road reaches **Lakki**, an unspoilt mountain village with stunning views. Lakki was a centre of resistance against the Turks and later the Germans. From Lakki, the road travels to **Omalos** and **Xyloskalo**, where the Samaria Gorge starts.

Many hikers sleep in Omalos to get an early-morning head start on the trail. **Hotel Exari** (☎28210 67180; www.exari.gr; s/d €25/35) has 24 well-furnished rooms with TV, bathtub and balconies. Owner Yiorgos can drive hikers to Samaria's trailhead. **Hotel Neos Omalos** (☎28210 67590; www.neos-omalos.gr; s/d €20/30; ☎☎) has 26 modern, nicely decorated rooms with mountain-view balconies. The owners are a font of information on

MILIA MOUNTAIN RETREAT

One of Crete's ecotourism trailblazers, the isolated **Milia Mountain Retreat** (☎28220 46774; www.milia.gr; d incl breakfast €75-85) was inspired by a back-to-nature philosophy. Sixteen abandoned stone farm houses were restored into eco-cottages with only solar energy for basic needs (leave the laptop and hairdryer at home), antique beds and rustic furnishings. Milia is one of the most atmospheric and peaceful places to stay on the island, but it is also worth a visit just to dine at the superb taverna, which has a frequently changing seasonal menu depending on what is available from the organic produce cultivated on its farm, including their own oil, wine, milk, cheese and free-range chickens, goats and sheep. Try the *bourecki* (filo pastry pie), the stuffed rabbit with *myzithra* (sheep's milk cheese) or yoghurt, or pork with lemon leaves baked slowly overnight. There is local wine and *raki* but no Coke or anything processed.

To get there, follow the road from Hania towards Elafonisi as far as the village of Topolia, turn right towards Tsourouniana, then left after 500m. After 8km turn right to Milia and follow a 2km-long graded dirt road to the retreat.

local hikes and other outdoor activities and can also shuttle you to Samaria Gorge.

The EOS-maintained **Kallergi Hut** (☎28210 33199; dm shared bathroom members/nonmembers €10/15) offers bare-bones shelter in the hills between Omalos and the Samaria Gorge.

Samaria Gorge Φαράγγι της Σαμαριάς

Although you'll have company (over 1000 people per day in summer), hiking the **Samaria Gorge** (☎28210 67179; admission €5; ☀6am-3pm May-mid-Oct) makes for a memorable experience. Check climatic conditions in advance – many aspiring hikers have been disappointed when park officials close the gorge on exceptionally hot days.

At 16km, the Samaria (*sah-mah-rih-ah*) Gorge is reputedly Europe's longest. It begins just below the Omalos Plateau, carved out by the river that flows between the peaks of Avlimanakou (1858m) and Volakias (2115m) mountains. Samaria's width varies from 150m to 3m and its vertical walls soar up to 500m. Wildflowers bloom in April and May.

Samaria also shelters endangered species like Crete's beloved *kri-kri*, a shy seldom-seen wild goat. To save it from extinction, the gorge became a national park in 1962.

Hiking the Gorge

An early start (before 8am) helps to avoid the worst of the crowds, but during July and August even the early bus from Hania to the trailhead can be packed. Overnighting in Omalos and getting an early lift from there

allows you to get your toe on the line for the starting gun. There's nowhere to spend the night in the gorge so time your trek to finish by the time the gates close (3pm). Wear good hiking boots and take sunscreen, sunglasses, hat and water bottle (springs with good water exist, though not the main stream). Be aware that falling rocks can be a hazard and people have been injured; in 2006 there were even two fatal incidents.

The hike from **Xyloskalo** (the name of the steep stone path that enters the gorge) to Agia Roumeli on the south coast takes from about four hours for the sprinters to six hours for the strollers. Early in the season it's sometimes necessary to wade through the stream. Later, as the flow drops, the stream-bed rocks become stepping stones.

The gorge is wide and open for the first 6km until you reach the abandoned settlement of **Samaria** whose inhabitants were relocated when the gorge became a national park. Just south of the village is a small church dedicated to **St Maria of Egypt**, after whom the gorge is named. Every 1 May numerous locals attend the *panigyri* (saint's day) of St Mary.

Beyond here, the gorge narrows and becomes more dramatic until, at the 11km mark, the walls are only 3.5m apart. These are the famous **Iron Gates** (*sidiroportes*) where a rickety wooden pathway leads hikers the 20m or so across the water.

The gorge ends at the 12.5km mark just north of the almost abandoned village of Old Agia Roumeli. From here it's a further uninteresting 2km hike to the welcoming seaside resort of **Agia Roumeli**, with its

much appreciated fine pebble beach and sparkling sea, perfect for taking a refreshing dip or at least bathing sore and aching feet.

Agia Roumeli has accommodation and eating, should you wish to stay over. One option is **Artemis Studios** (☎28250 91225; www.agiaroumeli.com; s/d/tr €45/55/70; 🏠), a dozen self-catering studios blissfully set away from the Samaria Gorge entrance and within 50m of the beach.

i Getting There & Away

There are excursions to the Samaria Gorge from every sizable town and resort in Crete, but you can get there easily enough from Hania by bus (via Omalos) and hike down the gorge to Agia Roumeli, catch a boat to Sougia and from there the bus it back to Hania. There are also ferries to other south coast towns, including Hora Sfakion, Loutro and Paleohora, in case you're tempted to linger a day or two.

Hora Sfakion **Χώρα Σφακίων**

POP 302

The more bullet holes you see in the passing road signs, the closer you are to Hora Sfakion (*ho-ra sfa-kee-on*), long renowned in Cretan history for its rebellious streak against foreign occupiers. However, the small coastal port is an amiable if eccentric place that caters well enough to today's foreign visitors – many of whom are Samaria Gorge hikers stumbling off the Agia Roumeli on their way back to Hania. Most of them pause only long enough to catch the next bus out, but the settlement can be a relaxing stay for a few days. There are several beaches accessible by boat or road, including the isolated **Sweetwater** and **Ilingas** beaches to the west. Hora Sfakion is also a convenient spot for heading westwards to other resorts or catching the ferry to Gavdos Island.

Under Venetian and Turkish rule Hora Sfakion was an important maritime centre and the nucleus of the Cretan struggle for independence. The Turks inflicted severe reprisals on the locals for their rebelliousness in the 19th century, after which the town fell into an economic slump that lasted until the arrival of tourism a couple of decades ago. Hora Sfakion played a prominent role during WWII as the place where thousands of Allied troops were evacuated by sea after the Battle of Crete. Today, a memorial to the last British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers evacuated after the battle stands on the eastern bluff above town.

Sleeping & Eating

Among the row of similar seafood tavernas, **Delfini** is the best for fresh fish dishes (€40 to €55 per kilo), while **Lefka Ori** at the western end of the port makes excellent goat *stifadhó* with wild greens. Also try the *Sfakiani pita* (Sfakian pie) – a thin, circular pie with sweet *myzithra* cheese and flecked with honey.

TOP CHOICE Xenia Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎28250 91490; www.sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr; d €33-38; 🏠🚰) For best value and location look no further than this refurbished hotel on the western waterfront with 21 rooms equipped with satellite TV and fridges. Stairs lead down to the hotel's pebbled sunbathing patio; swimmers can climb down a ladder into the sea.

Rooms Stavris

PENSION €

(☎28250 91220; www.hotel-stavris-chora-sfakion.com; s/d/tr €29/34/39; 🏠) Up the steps at the western end of the port, this long-running place owned by the Perrakis family has clean, basic rooms, some with kitchenettes.

i Information

Hora Sfakion has one ATM. The post office is on the square, opposite the police station.

i Getting There & Away

Boat

The ferry quay is at eastern end of the harbour. Hora Sfakion is the eastern terminus for the south-coast ferries to Paleohora and also has boats to Gavdos Island. Tickets are sold in the booth in the car park. From June to August there is a daily boat service from Hora Sfakion to Paleohora (€16, three hours) via Loutro, Agia Roumeli and Sougia. The boat leaves Hora Sfakion at 1pm and stops for two hours at Agia Roumeli to catch the gorge walkers heading west. There are four additional boats between Hora Sfakion and Agia Roumeli (€12, one hour) via Loutro (€5, 15 minutes). From June there are boats (€15, 1½ hours) to Gavdos Island on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Bus

Buses leave from the square up the hill on the northeastern side. There are four buses daily to Hania (€7.60, two hours); the afternoon buses at 5.30pm and 7pm wait for the boats from Agia Roumeli. In summer, three daily buses make the trip to Rethymno via Vryses (€7, one hour). There are also two buses daily to Frangokastello (€2, 25 minutes).

Around Hora Sfakion

The small but densely built-up fishing village of **Loutro** lies between Agia Roumeli and Hora Sfakion and is only accessible by boat or on foot. The town's crescent of white-and-blue buildings, hugging a narrow beach, positively sparkles on sunny days. Loutro is the only natural harbour on the south coast of Crete, an advantage that made it strategically vital in centuries past. The absence of cars and bikes makes it quiet and peaceful.

For overnights, try the **Blue House** (☎28250 91035; www.bluehouse.loutro.gr; d €40-50; 🏠), whose spacious, well-appointed rooms have sea-facing verandahs. The downstairs taverna serves excellent *mayirefta* (€5 to €7), including delicious garlicky spinach and a tasty *boureki*.

Frangokastello Φραγγοκαστέλλο

POP 154

One of Crete's best beaches lies just below the equally magnificent 14th-century fortress of **Frangokastello**, 15km east of Hora Sfakion. The Venetians built it to guard against pirates and feisty Sfakians, who rebelled from the beginning of the occupation. This history has generated a ghastly legend. On 17 May 1828, during the War of Independence, many Cretan fighters were killed here by the Turks. According to legend their ghosts – the *drosoulites* – revisit the beach on the battle's anniversary.

The wide, white-sand beach beneath the fortress slopes gradually into shallow warm water, making it ideal for kids. Development has been kept to a minimum with most accommodation set back from the shore, leaving the natural beauty largely untouched. In summer, occasional concerts and folk dance performances liven up the ambience.

A few pensions line the main road. For a treat, check into **Mylos** (☎28250 92162; www.milos-sfakia.com; studios & apts €40-60; 🏠), a century-old stone windmill that's been turned into an apartment in a pretty spot on the beach. There are also four stone cottages under the tamarisk trees and modern well-equipped studios nearby. The onsite taverna serves tasty local fare, although the best place to eat at is **Oasis**, which does well-executed Cretan dishes (€6 to €8); the owner also rents out a few rooms.

In summer, two daily buses stop in Frangokastello en route from Hora Sfakion to Plakias. There's also one bus daily to Hania (€8.40, 2½ hours).

Anopoli & Inner Sfakia Ανόπολη & Μέσα Σφακιά

A zigzagging asphalt road winding northwest from Hora Sfakion leads, after 14km, to historic Anopoli (ah-no-po-lee). Now a tiny, sparsely settled village in Sfakia's stony interior, Anopoli was once prosperous and powerful and the birthplace of revolutionary leader Ioannis Daskalogiannis. This dashing character, known for his bravery, even hobnobbed with Russian royalty and in 1770 organised the first Cretan insurrection against the Turks. However, the promised Russian reinforcements never came and Daskalogiannis surrendered himself to save his followers; he was skinned alive in Iraklio.

Today a white statue of Daskalogiannis anchors Anopoli's square where the highly recommended **Platanos** (mains €4-9) serves hearty lunches, including its famous roast lamb. The friendly English-speaking owner Eva Kopasis also rents simple **rooms** (s/d €25/30; 🏠) year-round and can advise about hikes to Loutro and local beaches.

The virtually abandoned stone hamlet of **Aradena**, about 2km west of Anopoli, is famous for the **Vardinogiannis Bridge** that crosses over the Aradena Gorge. Look down into the depth in fascinated horror as the chipped and rusted wood-and-steel bridge ripples under your wheels. At weekends you may see people jumping into the gorge from this bridge which is, at 138m, the highest **bungee jumping** (☎69376 15191; www.bungy.gr) bridge in Greece.

At the snack bar next to the bridge, ask for directions to the remote **Church of Agios Ioannis**, a whitewashed early Byzantine structure that's about 1km away; unfortunately, it's rarely open. From the church a hiking path leads to the sea, forking either west to Agia Roumeli (via the Byzantine Church of Agios Pavlos, with stunning views), or east to the lovely **Marmara Beach**.

Another hike to the beach goes through the **Aradena Gorge**. The trailhead is signposted before the bridge leading to Aradena (when coming from Anopoli). Alternatively, you can start in Anopoli and walk 3km to the trailhead. The 3.5km trek is moderately difficult. From **Marmara Beach**, you can either

backtrack to Anopoli or walk to the glittering nearby port of **Loutro** and jump on the Hora Sfakion–Paleohora boat to get out.

One daily bus (coming from Hania) makes the trip from Hora Sfakion to Anopoli (€3.30, 30 minutes). Taxi rides cost about €20 each way.

For other forays into Inner Sfakia, head north from Hora Sfakion on the main road towards Vryses. This breathtaking tour passes through the eastern Lefka Ori, with the stunning, 8km-long **Imbros Gorge** (admission €2; ☺year-round) running parallel to the road on the western side. You'll soon reach the village of **Imbros**, which accesses this lesser-visited gorge; the trail ends at **Komitades** village. From here, it's a 5km walk to Hora Sfakion, or take a taxi (€20).

All Hania–Hora Sfakion buses can stop in Imbros.

Sougia Σούγια

POP 97

Sougia (*soo-yah*), 67km south of Hania and on the Hora Sfakion–Paleohora ferry route, is one of the most laid-back and refreshingly undeveloped beach resorts on the south coast, with a lovely wide curve of sand-and-pebble beach. There are just a few small complexes of rooms, tavernas, a couple of lazy beach bars, two open-air clubs and a small settlement of campers and nudists at the eastern end of the beach. It is also great hiking territory, close to the Samaria and Agia Irini Gorges.

Sleeping

Captain George

PENSION €

(☎28230 51133; g-gentek@otenet.gr; s/d/studio €37/41/48; ☹) Captain George, who operates taxi boats to nearby beaches in his spare time, also presides over these attractive, good-value rooms and studios with fridges sitting next to a lovely garden. There's a minimum stay of six nights in high season.

Santa Irene Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎28230 51342; www.santa-irene.gr; d/apt €55/70; ☹@) This smart beach hotel has airy rooms with marble floors, TV and kitchenettes as well as two larger family rooms.

Aretousa

PENSION €

(☎28230 51178; s/d/studio €35/40/42; ☹☹) This lovely pension on the road to Hania, 200m from the sea, has bright and comfortable rooms and studios, most with kitchen-

ettes. There's a relaxing garden and playground for kids out the back.

Eating

Polyfimos

GREEK €

(mains €5-8; ☺dinner) Tucked off the Hania road behind the police station, ex-hippie Yianni makes his own oil, wine and *raki* as well as dolmadhes (rice-stuffed vine leaves) from the leafy vines that cover the courtyard, plus lots of other tasty meat-free dishes.

Taverna Rembetiko

CRETAN €

(mezedhes €2-5) This popular place has excellent Cretan mezedhes, including fabulous *boureki* and stuffed zucchini flowers. It's also known for its Greek music.

Information

There's an ATM next to Taverna Galini. For pre-trip planning, check out www.sougia.info. **Internet Lotos** (per hr €3; ☺7am-late) can get you online.

Getting There & Away

The bus stop is outside the Santa Irene Hotel. Two daily buses operate between Hania and Sougia (€7.10, two hours). Boats leave in the morning for Agia Roumeli (€6.30, 45 minutes), Loutro (€12, 1½ hours) and Hora Sfakion (€13, 1¾ hours). There's also an afternoon service west to Paleohora (€8.50, 50 minutes).

Paleohora Παλαιόχωρα

POP 2205

There is still a vaguely 1972 feel about Paleohora (*pal-ee-oh-hor-a*), originally 'discovered' by hippies back in the day. Despite a few mid-sized hotels catering to package tourists, the place is still appealing, full of colour and laid back. The oddly shaped town lies on a narrow peninsula with a long, curving tamarisk-shaded sandy beach (Pahia Ammos) exposed to the wind on one side and a sheltered pebbly beach (Halikia) on the other. Shallow waters and general quietude also make Paleohora a good choice for families with small children. The most picturesque part of Paleohora is the maze of narrow streets around the castle.

The town does get a bit more spirited in summer when the main street and pebble beach road are closed to traffic in the evening. Tavernas spill out onto the pavement and occasional cultural happenings as well as Cretan and international music inject a lively ambience. In spring and autumn, Paleohora attracts many walkers.

Sights

Venetian Castle

CASTLE

It's worth clambering up the ruins of the 13th-century Venetian castle for the splendid view of the sea and mountains. The castle was built so the Venetians could keep an eye on the southwestern coast from this commanding position on the hill top. There's not much left of the fortress, however, as it was destroyed by the Venetians, the Turks, the pirate Barbarossa in the 16th century, and the Germans during WWII.

Sleeping

Most accommodation closes in the low season.

Homestay Anonymous

PENSION €

(☎28230 42098; www.anonymoushomestay.com; s/d/tr €23/28/32) This simple pension with private bathrooms and shared cooking facilities in the courtyard garden is a good budget pick. Owner Manolis cultivates a welcoming atmosphere and is a mine of information for local things to do and see. The rooms are clean and tastefully furnished, though a bit cramped.

Villa Anna

PENSION €€

(☎2810 346428; anna@her.forthnet.gr; apt €42-80; 🍷🍷) Set in a lovely shady garden bordered by tall poplars, these well-appointed, family-friendly apartments can sleep up to five people. There are cots, a garden with swings and a sandpit, and the grounds are secured.

Oriental Bay Rooms

PENSION €

(☎28230 41076; www.orientalbay.gr; s/d/tr €30/35/40; 🍷🍷) These immaculate rooms are in the large modern building at the northern end of the stony beach. Rooms have balconies with sea or mountain views and come with kettle and fridge.

Aris Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎28230 41502; www.aris-hotel.gr; s/d incl breakfast €40/50) This friendly good-value hotel at the end of the road skirting the headland has bright garden- and sea-view rooms.

Eating

Kyma

SEAFOOD €€

(fish per kg €40-55) This old-school eatery with a patio overlooking the pebble beach is famous for its owner-caught fish. The actual menu varies by the day, but the red

mullet, red snapper and scorpion fish are all excellent and frequently available. The grilled meats (try the excellent *soutsoukaki* – meatballs in red sauce) will appease landlubbers.

Inochoos

CRETAN €

(mains €6-10) Run by the hospitable Tsatsaronaki brothers, this popular outdoor taverna on the main street has a marvellous selection of well-done Cretan dishes. Try Cretan *dakos* (rusks with tomatoes and cheese) accompanied by a selection of small fish you can put together yourself for around €10 to €14 per serving.

Samaria

CRETAN €

(mains €8-10) In a roofless old stone building with ambient courtyard seating, this welcoming place does great Cretan fare delivered with gracious service. Specialties include lamb *tsigariasto* (sauteéd) and rooster *kokkinisto* (rooster in wine sauce), as well as Cretan *myzithropitakia* (cheese pies).

Third Eye

VEGETARIAN €

(mains €5-8) A local institution, the Third Eye has an eclectic menu of meat-free curries, salads and pastas as well as Greek and Asian dishes. There's live music weekly in summer. The restaurant is just in from the sandy Pahlia Ammos Beach.

Karakatsanis Zaharoplasteion

DESSERTS €

Above the Inochoos restaurant, you can indulge in the gooiest of cakes, chocolate profiteroles and fresh-baked waffles with a dollop of ice cream.

Drinking & Entertainment

Skala Bar

BAR

(www.skalabar.gr; ☎7am-5am; 🍷) This portside classic has a relaxing terrace for coffees, waffles and free wi-fi by day, while by night the small bar gets packed solid with party people.

La Jettee

BAR

(☎9am-2am) A tourist favourite known for its cocktails, this bar is open all day but gets most punters by night. It's right on the beach, behind the Villa Marise Hotel, and has a lovely garden.

Nostos

NIGHTCLUB

(between Eleftheriou Venizelou & the Old Harbour) This club has outdoor terrace bar and small indoor dance floor where you'll be showered with Greek and Western music.

i Information

Three ATMs are on Eleftheriou Venizelou, while the post office is at Pahlia Ammos Beach's northern end.

Municipal tourist office (☎28230 41507; ☉10am-1pm & 6-9pm Wed-Mon May-Oct) On the beach road near the harbour.

Notos Internet (Eleftheriou Venizelou 53; per hr €2; ☉8am-10pm)

i Getting There & Away

Boat

Boats leave from the old harbour at the beach's southern end. In summer there is a daily morning ferry from Paleohora to Hora Sfakion (€16, three hours) via Sougia (€8.50, 50 minutes), Agia Roumeli (€12.50, 1½ hours) and Loutra (€14, 2½ hours). The same boat also continues three times per week in summer to Gavdos Island (€15.50, 2½ hours).

From mid-April there's also ferry service to the west-coast beach of Elafonisi (€8, one hour). The service increases from three times per week to daily between mid-May and September. It departs at 10am and returns at 4pm.

Bus

In summer, four to six daily buses serve Hania (€7.60, two hours). An early bus leaves at 6.15am to Omalos (€5.50, two hours) for the Samaria Gorge, also stopping at the Agia Irini Gorge (€4.50).

i Getting Around

Notos Rentals (☎28230 42110; www.notoscar.com; Eleftheriou Venizelou) Rents cars, motorcycles and bicycles.

Elafonisi Ελαφονήσι

It's easy to understand why people enthuse so much about Elafonisi. At the southern extremity of Crete's west coast, the beach is long, wide and separated from the Elafonisi Islet by about 50m of knee-deep water. The clear, shallow turquoise water and fine white sand create a tropical paradise. There are a few snack bars on the beach, and umbrella and lounge-chair rentals. The islet is marked by low dunes and a string of semi-secluded coves that attract a sprinkling of naturists. Unfortunately this idyllic scene can be spoilt by the busloads of day trippers who descend in summer.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Rooms Elafonisi PENSION € (☎28250 61274, s/d €30/40; 🍷) The 21 spacious rooms here have fridges, and there are

nice furnished bigger rooms out the back among the olive groves, as well as apartments with kitchens. The outdoor patio has views and there's an attached restaurant.

Rooms Panorama PENSION € (☎28220 61548; s/d studio €25/30) This place has a taverna overlooking the sea from its commanding position on a bluff. Rooms have a kitchenette and fridge, but many are rented by the month to itinerant workers.

Innahorion CRETAN € (mains €3-6) About 2.5km before the coast at Elafonisi, this restaurant is the best in the area, serving good Cretan food on the terrace.

i Getting There & Away

There is one boat daily from Paleohora to Elafonisi (€8, one hour) from mid-May through September. There is also one bus daily from Hania (€11, 2½ hours) and Kissamos-Kastelli (€7, 1¼ hours), which returns in the afternoon. Neither option leaves much time to relax on both beaches, so driving is ideal.

Gavdos Island Νησί της Γαύδος

POP 55

Europe's most southerly point, Gavdos lies 45km south of Hora Sfakion in the Libyan Sea. The island is surprisingly green, with almost 65% covered in low-lying pine and cedar trees and vegetation. Gavdos has three main 'villages', which are virtually abandoned and full of ruins, and one beach settlement that gets relatively lively in July and August. With only a smattering of rooms and tavernas, it's a blissful spot with several unspoilt beaches – some accessible only by boat. The island attracts campers, nudists and free spirits seeking to peace out on balmy beaches under the stars.

Water is plentiful, but there can be electricity outages because only part of the island has grid power; the rest uses generators which are often turned off at night. Bring a flashlight. Strong winds can leave visitors stranded for days on end as boats won't risk the open-sea journey back to Crete.

👁 Sights & Activities

Karabe is the port on the east side of the island, while the capital Kastri is in the centre. The biggest beach community at Sarakinikos, in the northeast, has a wide swath of sand and several tavernas, as well as an am-

PALEOHORA–SOUGIA COASTAL WALK

From the town centre of Paleohora, follow signs to the camp sites to the northeast. Turn right at the intersection with the road to Anydri and soon you'll be following the coastal path marked as the E4 European Footpath. After a couple of kilometres, the path climbs steeply for a beautiful view back to Paleohora. You'll pass **Anydri Beach** and several inviting coves where people may be getting an all-over tan. Take a dip because the path soon turns inland to pass over **Cape Flomes**. You'll walk along a plateau carpeted with brush that leads towards the coast and some breathtaking views over the Libyan Sea. Soon you'll reach the Minoan site of **Lissos** beyond which the path takes you through a pine forest. The road ends at Sougia Harbour. The 14.5km walk (allow about six hours) is nearly shadeless, so take several litres of water and sunscreen. From June through August, it's best to start at sunrise in order to get to Sougia before the heat of the day.

phitheatre for occasional performances. The stunning Agios Ioannis Beach, on the northern tip, has a scraggly summer settlement of nudists and campers, though numbers swell in summer. There are more wonderful beaches on the northern coast such as Potamos and Pyrgos, which you can reach by foot (about an hour) from Kastri by following the path leading north to Ambelos and beyond. Three giant arches carved into the rocky headland at Tripiti – the southernmost tip of Europe – are Gavdos' best-known natural feature. The beach is reached by boat or on foot (a 2.5km walk from Vatsiana).

Sleeping & Eating

Sarakiniko Studios STUDIOS €
(☎28230 42182; www.gavdostudios.gr; d/tr studio incl breakfast €50/70) These comfortable studios are right above Sarakiniko Beach. Villas sleeping up to five are also available (€80 to €100). Phone ahead for port pick-up or walk 20 minutes north.

Taverna Sarakiniko SEAFOOD €€
This place is run by fisherman Manolis and his wife Gerti who cooks up Manolis' fresh catch daily. Try the tangy grilled octopus or red snapper braised with lemon and olive oil.

Getting There & Away

Boat services to Gavdos vary seasonally and can take 2½ to five hours depending on the boat. The most direct route is from Hora Sfakion on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (€15, 2½ hours). From Paleohora, two weekly boats (three in high summer) run via the southern ports and Hora Sfakion, lengthening the trip to five hours.

Only some ferries take cars – enquire ahead. Otherwise, bike and car hire are available at Gavdos' port or in Sarakiniko.

Kissamos-Kastelli Κίσσαμος-Καστέλλι

POP 3969

Known primarily for its ferries to Kythira and the Peloponnese, quiet Kissamos-Kastelli has a more Greek feel than other north coast resorts. Perhaps the distance from Hania has saved it from the extremes of package tourism. For beach lovers, it's a great base; along with the fine sandy beach in town, there are nearby Falasarna and the beaches around Gramvousa (usually accessed by boat trip). Even Elafonisi is only a quick car trip away. Indeed, having a car is a big help for anyone wishing to explore the area.

Ancient Kissamos was the capital of the eponymous province and a harbour for the important city-state of Polyrrinia, 7km inland. Vestiges of Roman buildings have been unearthed, but most of the ancient city lies beneath the modern town and cannot be excavated. After the Venetians constructed a castle here, it became known as Kastelli. The name persisted until 1966 when authorities decided that too many people were confusing it with Crete's other Kastelli, near Iraklio. The official name reverted to Kissamos, though it is often called Kastelli or Kissamos-Kastelli. Parts of the castle wall still survive.

Sights

FREE **Archaeological Museum of Kissamos**

MUSEUM

(☎28220 83308; Plateia Tzanakaki; ☎8.30am–1pm) In an imposing two-level Venetian-Turkish building on the main square, this museum presents locally excavated treasure, including statues, jewellery, coins and a large mosaic floor from a Kissamos villa. Most of the items are from the Hellenistic

and Roman eras, though there are also some Minoan objects.

Sleeping



Stavroula Palace

HOTEL €€

(☎28220 23260; www.varouchakis.gr/stavroulapalace; s/d/tr incl breakfast €50/65/80; 🍷🍷) This cheery and good-value waterfront hotel has breezy, modern rooms with balconies (some overlooking the sea). The town centre, the best beach and the top waterfront eateries and bars can all be reached within a few minutes' walk. If you've got tots in tow you can lie by the pool and still keep an eye on them as they frolic around the recreation area out the back.

Bikakis

PENSION €

(☎28220 22105; www.familybikakis.gr; Iroön Polemiston 1941; s/d/studio €20/25/30; 🍷🍷) This top budget pick near the town centre about 250m inland offers clean rooms and studios, most with garden and sea views, plus kitchenettes. Owner Giannis has a knack for extending a warm welcome to his guests.



Eating & Drinking

Papadakis

SEAFOOD €€

(fish per kg €4-55) This classic taverna on the central waterfront gets top marks for its owner-caught fish but also has plenty of tasty *mayirefta* and grilled meats. Thumbs up for the roast aubergines and *keftedakia* (meatballs).

Taverna Petra

GREEK €

(souvlakia €2.30) This unassuming place cornering the main square serves the best souvlaki pitta in town (along with a range of other grilled meats), accompanied by pungent local olive oil – a nourishing and cheaper alternative to the waterfront restaurants.

Cafe Bar Babel

CAFE, BAR €

(☎9am-2am) Not only a good choice for a quick breakfast or snack, this waterfront cafe-bar also gets lively at night with young Greeks picking their way through one of the most extensive beer and cocktails lists in town.



Information

There are ATMs on Skalidi, the main commercial street, which runs east from the central Plateia Tzanakaki. The post office is on the main through road, near Plateia Venizelou. Most tavernas and bars line the seafront promenade.

For online info see www.kissamos.net.



Getting There & Away

Boat

The port is 3km west of town. **Lane** (www.lane.gr) operates ferries to Piraeus via Antikythira, Kythira and Gythio (see table, p260). In summer, a bus meets ferries; otherwise taxis into town cost around €5.

Bus

There are 13 daily buses to Hania (€4.70, one hour) leaving from the bus station on Plateia Tzanakaki. In summer, two daily buses go to Falasarna (€3.50, 20 minutes) and one to Elafonisi (€7, 1¼ hours). One bus daily makes the run to Paleohora (€7.20, 1¼ hours).



Getting Around

Moto Fun (☎28220 23440; www.motofun.info; Plateia Tzanakaki) Rents cars, bikes and mountain bikes.

Around Kissamos-Kastelli

FALASARNA ΦΑΛΑΣΑΡΝΑ

Some 16km west of Kissamos-Kastelli, Falasarna was a 4th-century-BC Cretan city-state, but there's not much of the ancient city left to see. Its long sandy beach is one of Crete's best, comprising several coves separated by rocky spits. Along with great water clarity, Falasarna has wonderfully big waves – long rollers coming from the open Mediterranean, which are great for splashing around in. The end-of-the-world feel is accentuated by spectacular sunsets, when pink hues are reflected from the sand's fine coral.

Falasarna has no settlement, though a few pensions and tavernas stand behind the beach. There are two buses daily from Kissamos-Kastelli (€3.50, 20 minutes) as well as three buses on weekdays from Hania (€7.60, 1½ hours).

GRAMVOUSA PENINSULA

ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ ΓΡΑΜΒΟΥΣΑ

Northwest of Falasarna, the wild and remote Gramvousa Peninsula shelters the stunning lagoon-like sandy beach of **Balos** on its western tip. The idyllic beach with turquoise waters overlooks the two islets of **Agria** (wild) and **Imeri** (tame). The only way to avoid the summertime crowds (which peak between 11am and 4pm) is to wake up early or stay on through the late afternoon. Even with the crowds the beach remains undeniably gorgeous, with lapping translucent waters dotted with tiny shellfish and darting

fish. There is no shade, however; umbrellas with sun beds can be rented for €5.

The easiest way to get to the peninsula is on one of the three daily 55-minute **cruises** (www.gramvousa.com; adult/concession €22/12) on different-sized boats. Each boat stops at different places first to avoid overcrowding, either at Balos or at the island of Imeri Gramvousa.

If you're driving, the rough dirt road (best in a 4WD) to Balos begins in Kalyviani village and ends at a car park with a snack bar. A 1.2km path leads down to the sandy cliffs.

West-bound buses from Kissamos-Kastelli leave you at the Kalyviani turn-off; from here it's a 2km walk to the beginning of the path, straight down Kalyviani's main street. The 3km walk to Balos is shadeless, so gear up and take water.

EASTERN CRETE

Head east from Iraklio past the rocking resorts of Hersonisos and Malia and you enter the island's easternmost prefecture of Lasithi, a more relaxed Cretan world that is never short of surprises. Looking for a charming resort town with cool after-dark ambience? None better than Lasithi's main tourist draw of Agios Nikolaos. Ancient sites and culture? Lasithi has Minoan and Mycenaean sites aplenty whose excavated treasures fill numerous museums. The fertile Lasithi Plateau, tucked into the Mt Dikti ranges, offers cycling opportunities through tranquil villages to the Dikteon Cave where Zeus himself was born. Outdoor types could also tackle one of the region's more accessible canyon walks, such as the dramatic Valley of the Dead at Kato Zakros.

Added value comes with such unique attractions as the historic monastery of Toplou and Vai's famous palm-lined beach. Scores of smaller towns and villages, meanwhile, maintain a rich undertow of Cretan history and spirit. All of this diversity is underpinned by a choice of accommodation and some of Crete's finest tavernas and restaurants.

Lasithi Plateau Οροπέδιο Λασιθίου

The tranquil Lasithi Plateau, 900m above sea level, is a vast expanse of green fields interspersed with almond trees and orchards. It's really more of a plain than a plateau, sitting as it does in a huge depression amid the

rock-studded mountains of the Dikti range. Lasithi would have been a stunning sight in the 17th century when it was dotted with some 20,000 windmills with white canvas sails, which the Venetians built for irrigation purposes. Although only 5000 remain and few are still used, the windmills of Lasithi remain an iconic sight.

The Lasithi Plateau's rich soil has been cultivated since Minoan times. Following an uprising against Venetian rule in the 13th century, the Venetians expelled the inhabitants of Lasithi and destroyed their orchards. The plateau lay abandoned for 200 years until food shortages forced the Venetians to recolonise and cultivate the area and to build the irrigation trenches and wells that still serve the region.

TZERMIADO ΤΖΕΡΜΙΑΔΟ

The largest of Lasithi's 20 villages, **Tzermiado** (dzer-mee-ah-do) is a bucolic place with two ATMs and a post office. Although tourists visiting the Dikteon Cave pass through, Tzermiado remains placid. **Taverna Kourites** (www.kourites.eu; mains €6-12) does top-notch roast lamb and suckling pig, cooked in a wood-fired oven, as well as vegetarian options. There are clean and simple rooms above the taverna and in a nearby small **hotel** (s/d €35/40, breakfast €5).

Or go a bit more upscale at **Argoulias** (☎28440 22754; www.argoulias.gr; d incl breakfast €70-80; 🏠), a set of apartments with stylish traditional decor and furnishings built into the hillside above the main village. The owners also run the taverna across the road. Look for signs to Argoulias at the entrance to Tzermiado coming from the east. Both places rent bicycles.

AGIOS GEORGIOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ

Agios Georgios (*agh-ios ye-or-gios*) is a tiny village on the southern side of the Lasithi Plateau and the most pleasant to stay. The local **folklore museum** (☎28440 31462; admission €3; 🕒10am-4pm Apr-Oct) includes some intriguing personal photos of writer Nikos Kazantzakis.

Hotel Maria (☎28440 31774; d/tr/q incl breakfast €59/78/98) has pleasantly quirky rooms with narrow traditional mountain beds on stone bases. Local furnishings and woven wall hangings add to the cheerful atmosphere. For eats, try **Taverna Rea** (mains €5-7), a bright little place full of local artefacts. It's on the main street and offers breakfast and well-cooked Cretan staples,

including vegetarian dishes. Rooms above the taverna rent for €30.

PSYHRO & THE DIKTEON CAVE ΨΥΧΡΟ & ΔΙΚΤΑΙΟΝ ΑΝΤΠΟΝ

Psychro (psi-hro), the closest village to the **Dikteon Cave** (adult/child €4/2; ☀8am-6pm Jun-Oct, 8am-2.30pm Nov-May), is prettier than Tzermiadi and also has tavernas and souvenir shops. According to legend, the cave was where Rhea hid the newborn Zeus from Cronos, his offspring-gobbling father. It covers 2200 sq metres and features both stalactites and stalagmites. From the upper cave a steep staircase leads down to the more interesting lower cave. In the back on the left is a smaller chamber where Zeus was supposedly born. A larger hall on the right has small water-filled stone basins that Zeus allegedly drank from and a spectacular stalagmite that came to be known as the Mantle of Zeus. The entire cave is illuminated, although not particularly well, so watch your step. Numerous votives discovered here indicate cult worship; some are displayed in the Iraklio Archaeological Museum.

It is a steep 15-minute (800m) walk up to the cave entrance. You can take the fairly rough but shaded track on the right with views over the plateau or the unshaded and less interesting paved trail on the left of the car park. Donkey rides are available for €10 (€15 return).

i Getting There & Away

The main approach to the plateau is from Iraklio, taking the coast road east and then turning south just before Hersonisos. The best approach from Agios Nikolaos is via Neapoli. From Iraklio, daily buses serve Agios Georgios (€6.90, two hours), Psychro (€6.50, 3¼ hours) and Tzermiadi (€6.50, two hours). There are also buses to the villages from Agios Nikolaos.

Agios Nikolaos Άγιος Νικόλαος

POP 11,286

Lasithi's capital, Agios Nikolaos (ah-ye-os nih-ko-laos) stands on the shores of the beautiful Mirabello Bay. It seems less Cretan in character than other island towns, partly because of its resort-style flair and largely modern architecture. However, there's also a strong local character to Agios Nikolaos that makes it a charming and friendly place. The town's harbour is linked by a narrow channel to the circular Voulismeni Lake. The main harbour-front road crosses the

channel by a bridge and the pedestrianised lakeside is lined with cafes and restaurants. By day there's a cheerful buzz around the harbour and by night a decidedly chic ambience descends on the cafes and bars, where stylish young Greeks strut the harbourside catwalk and holidaymakers pour into town from the neighbouring resorts.

👁 Sights

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(📍28410 24943; Paleologou Konstantinou 74; admission €4; ☀8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun; 📞) Crete's most significant Minoan collection (after the Iraklio Archaeological Museum) includes clay coffins, ceramic musical instruments and gold from Mohlos as well as many other treasures from ancient times. At the time of writing, the museum was temporarily closed for refurbishment. Phone ahead for updated information.

Folk Museum

MUSEUM

(📍28410 25093; Paleologou Konstantinou 4; admission €3; ☀10am-2pm Tue-Sun) Adjacent to the tourist office, this small museum provides a window on traditional life through displays of handicrafts and costumes.

👤 Activities

Within town, **Ammos Beach** and **Kytoplatia Beach** are small and crowded, though convenient for a quick dip. **Almyros Beach** (1km south) is also busy but much longer, with better sand. It can be accessed by taxi (€6) or foot along a coastal path. The path starts at the seaward end of the first road that leads left from just past the municipal stadium.

Agios Nikolaos

👁 Sights

- 1 Archaeological Museum A1
- 2 Folk Museum B3

🛏 Sleeping

- 3 Du Lac Hotel B3
- 4 Hotel Creta D3

🍴 Eating

- 5 Chrysofillis D4
- 6 Itanos B4
- 7 Mare & Monte B2
- 8 Migomis B3
- 9 Pelagos B3

🍷 Drinking

- 10 Alexandros Roof Garden B3
- 11 Peripou Café B3

Further south towards Sitia, **Golden Beach** (Voulisma Beach) and **Istron Bay** boast long stretches of sand.

Festivals & Events

Marine Week

WATERSPORTS

Catch swimming, windsurfing and boat races during the last week of June in even-numbered years.

Lato Cultural Festival

CULTURAL

This festival features concerts by local and international musicians, folk dancing, *martinadhes* (rhyming couplets) contests,

theatre and art exhibitions in July and August.

Sleeping

Villa Olga

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28410 25913; www.villa-olga.gr; apt €80-95;   ) These delightful self-catering apartments sleeping two to six people are mid-way between Agios Nikolaos and Elounda. They have terrific views across the Gulf of Mirabello from their rising terraces surrounded by lovely gardens. Units are well equipped and have traditional furniture and scattered artefacts. There's a small swimming

Agios Nikolaos

 0 200 m
0 0.1 miles



pool and Olga, the owner, is charming and helpful.

Minos Beach Art Hotel BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€
(☎28410 22345; www.bluegr.com; r incl breakfast from €200; P☎☎☎) This classy resort in a superb location just out of town is a veritable art gallery, with sculptures from leading Greek and foreign artists adorning the grounds right down to the beach. The low-rise design and cool style maintain the hotel's position as one of the island's finest.

Lato Hotel HOTEL €€
(☎28410 24581; www.lato-hotel.com.gr; Amoudi; s/d incl breakfast €51/68; P☎☎☎) If you have your own transport, the Lato is a good choice about 1km northeast of the town centre towards Elounda. The beach is 300m away but there's a small pool for quick dips. The same management runs the charming **Karavostassi Apartments** (☎28410 24581; www.karavostassi.gr; apt €88-116) in an old carob warehouse on an isolated cove about 8km east from the Lato.

Du Lac Hotel HOTEL €€
(☎28410 22711; www.dulachotel.gr; 28 Oktovriou 17; s/d/studio €40/60/80; ☎) This central hotel has fine views over Voulismeni Lake from its decent rooms and spacious, fully fitted-out studios. Both have stylish contemporary furnishings and nice bathrooms.

Hotel Creta APARTMENTS €
(☎28410 28893; www.agiosnikaloas-hotels.gr; Sarolidi 22; s/d €45/50; ☎☎) There's excellent value at these well-kept and comfy self-catering apartments, where upper balconies have great views. Nearby parking is limited but the location is close to the town centre and quiet. There is a lift (elevator).

Eating

Most restaurants along the lake and on Kitroplateia are bland and overpriced. The backstreets around town, however, hold a wealth of tempting options.

Migomis INTERNATIONAL €€€
(☎28410 24353; Nikolaou Plastrira 20; mains €25-35) Migomis has scored high marks for years for its inventive cuisine inspired by international themes and ingredients. Guinea fowl with grape-and-strawberry confit and a dash of ginger is a typical creation. Views from high above Voulismeni Lake are superb and there's live piano music in summer. Reserve.

Chrysofillis MEZEDHES €
(☎28410 22705; Akti Pagalou; mezedhes €4-8) Well-priced food make this *mezedhopoleio* (restaurant specialising in mezedhes) a classic small-plate place with several varieties of ouzo as well as Greek wines to enhance the mood. Specials include cheese pies, fresh mussels and saffron chicken. Reserve.

Pelagos SEAFOOD €€€
(☎28410 25737; Stratigou Koraka 11; mains €9-28) Top-rated Pelagos is housed in a restored neoclassical building with a garden terrace and is especially noted for its fish and seafood. The menu also features meat and pasta dishes with Cretan flair. Reserve.

Itanos CRETAN €
(Kyprou 1; mains €5-10) Report to this friendly restaurant for terrific Cretan home-style cooking with a selection of several trays of fresh *mayirefta* daily. Owner Yiannis also makes his own pastry for delicious leek pies. Vegetarians have plenty to choose from.

Mare & Monte MEDITERRANEAN €€
(☎28410 83373; Akti Koundourou; www.maremonte-restaurant.com; mains €9-22) There's a subtle Italian influence on Cretan cuisine at this stylish seafront restaurant. A range of Greek, Italian and fish appetisers leads on to fine dishes such as grilled chicken with feta, olives and fennel or sea bass with lemon-and-thyme sauce.

Drinking

The waterfront cafe-bars with their plush seating along Akti Koundourou above the harbour get going mid-morning and later morph into lively bars.

Alexandros Roof Garden COCKTAIL BAR
(cnr Kondylaki & Paleologou Konstantinou; ☎noon-late) Enjoy classic sounds amid hanging plants, shrubs and funky decor.

Peripou Cafe CAFE
(28 Otkovriou 13; ☎☎) This charming period piece has the added bonus of incorporating a bookstore and book exchange. The most coveted tables are on the narrow balcony overlooking the lake.

Information

Most banks, ATMs, travel agencies and shops are on Koundourou and the parallel 28 Oktovriou.

E-Net (Kapetan Kozyri 10; per hr €2; ☎9am-6am)

General Hospital (☎28410 66000; Knosou 3) On the west side of town, atop steep Paleologou Konstantinou.

Municipal Tourist Office (☎28410 22357; www.agiosnikolaos.gr; ☀8am-9.30pm Apr-Nov) Opposite the north side of the bridge. Can change money and assist with accommodation.

Post office (28 Oktovriou 9; ☎7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist police (☎28410 91408; Erythrou Stavrou 47; ☎7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

i Getting There & Away

Bus

The bus station is at Plateia Venizelou just under 1km northwest of Voulismeni Lake. For timetable and route information, see <http://bus-service-crete-ktel.com>. The bus for Elounda makes a convenient stop outside the tourist office.

BUS SERVICES FROM AGIOS NIKOLAOS

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Elounda	20min	€1.70	16 daily
Ierapetra	1hr	€3.80	7 daily
Iraklio	1½hr	€7.10	half-hourly
Kritsa	15min	€1.60	10 daily
Lasithi Plateau (Dikteon Cave)	3hr	€5.80	2 daily
Sitia	1½hr	€7.60	7 daily

i Getting Around

Manolis Bikes (☎28410 24940; 25 Martiou 12) has a huge range of scooters, motorcycles and quad bikes. Prices begin at €20 a day for a scooter and €12 for a mountain bike.

Around Agios Nikolaos

ELOUNDA ΕΛΟΥΝΤΑ

POP 2085

There are fine mountain and sea views along the 11km road north from Agios Nikolaos to Elounda (el-oon-da), but a cluster of luxury resorts in the coves makes some beaches not easily accessible to nonresidents. The first elite hotel was built here in the mid-1960s, quickly establishing the Elounda area as a playground for Greece's high fliers. More recently the area has seen visits from a gaggle of international celebs including Leonardo di Caprio, U2 and Lady Gaga.

Elounda has a handsome harbour where fishing boats still come and go. The backdrop is standard resort, but there is also a refreshing down-to-earth feel to the village

and locals do a fine job of catering for visitors, regardless of their 'celebrity' status. The pleasant but unremarkable town beach, to the north of the port, can get very crowded. On the south side of Elounda a causeway leads to the Kolokytha Peninsula. If you'd like to see Spinalonga, it's much cheaper to get one of the half-hourly boats from here than to go from Agios.

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

Delfinia Studios & Apartments APARTMENTS € (☎28410 41641; www.pediaditis.gr; s/d/apt €35/40/55; ♿☎☎) Pleasant rooms (some with sea-view balconies) are supplemented by spacious apartments suitable for larger groups and families. The nearby affiliated **Milos Apartments** (same prices) has a pool.

Corali Studios APARTMENTS €€ (☎28410 41712; www.coralistudios.com; studio €75; ♿) About 800m from the clock tower on Elounda's northern side, these self-catering studios are set amid lush lawns with a shaded patio. The same family also runs the adjacent **Portobello Apartments** (€65-75).

TOP CHOICE Oceanis CRETAN € (☎28410 42246; mains €6.50-16) This restaurant is tucked away around the corner from Elounda's main square on the road to Plaka and between the town's two local beaches. Enthusiastic owner Adonis Bebelakis cooks for pleasure and sources his local raw materials with care. The style is slow-cooked Cretan classics such as oven-cooked garlic lamb, as well as family favourites such as *melitzanes tis mamas* (slices of aubergine baked with tomatoes, hard cheese and spearmint).

i Information

The post office and ATMs are on Elounda's main square, which doubles as a car park and overlooks an attractive working fishing harbour.

Babel Internet Cafe (Akti Vritomartidos, per hr €2)

Municipal Tourist Office (☎28410 42464; ☀8am-8pm Jun-Oct) On the square; gives general info and changes money.

i Getting There & Around

Buses stop at the main square. From Agios Nikolaos, 13 daily buses serve Elounda (€1.70, 20 minutes). Boats to Spinalonga leave every half-hour (adult/child €12/6).

Cars, motorcycles and scooters can be hired at **Elounda Travel** (☎28410 41800; www.elounda.travel.gr) in the main square.

SPINALONGA TALE *DES HANNIGAN*

The tiny Spinalonga Islet, just offshore from Plaka, was a fascinating enough place before the romantic novel *To Nisi* (The Island) boosted its 'must-see' reputation even more. The Venetians built the formidable fortress here in 1579 to protect the bays of Elounda and Mirabello, but Spinalonga eventually surrendered to Ottoman forces in 1715. From 1903 until 1955, during the post-Ottoman era, the island was a colony where Greeks suffering from leprosy (Hansen's disease) were quarantined. The early days of the colony were allegedly squalid and miserable. However, in 1953, the arrival of charismatic Athenian law student who had Hansen's Disease, Epaminondas Remoundakis, heralded the introduction of decent living conditions and of a redemptive spirit on the island, and the colony finally closed in 1973. It is this dramatic story around which Victoria Hislop weaves her touching tale.

The Greek television version of *To Nisi*, adapted by Mirella Papaconomou, has earned international acclaim for the quality of its production. Some see both the novel and the hugely popular TV series as being overly romanticised, but *To Nisi* is a genuine phenomenon that illuminates a deeply harrowing episode in Greek history. Many locals, and Victoria Hislop herself, had cameo roles in the series. The island had previously featured in a short film, *Last Words*, made in 1968 by Werner Herzog.

SPINALONGA ISLAND ΝΗΣΟΣ ΣΠΙΝΑΛΟΓΚΑ

Spinalonga Island lies in a pretty setting off the northern tip of the Kolokytha Peninsula. Its massive **fortress** (admission €3; ☉10am-6pm) was built in 1579 to protect Elounda Bay and the Gulf of Mirabello. With the explosion of interest in Spinalonga in the wake of Virginia Hislop's bestselling novel *To Nisi* and the Greek TV series spin-off, you're unlikely to feel lonely on the island. In fact, there is even a reconstructed section of a street from the period featured in the novel.

Ferries to Spinalonga depart half-hourly from Elounda (€10) and Plaka (€5), giving you an hour to see the sights (though you can stay longer and return on a different boat). From Agios Nikolaos, various companies run basic tours and day-trip excursions (from €20).

KRITSA & AROUND KPITEA

POP 2705

The fine traditions of the old mountain village of Kritsa (krit-sah), 11km from Agios Nikolaos, are a touch blurred by the often insistent techniques of sellers of embroidered goods. Many items are imported and few reflect the time-consuming skills of the village seamstresses. The upper village, however, beneath rugged crags, is redolent with romantic decay and the ghosts of the past. Note that packed tour coaches pile into Kritsa from late morning until late afternoon.

There are hourly buses here from Agios Nikolaos (€1.60, 15 minutes).

Sights outside of town include the tiny, triple-aisled **Church of Panagia Kera** (admission €3; ☉8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat),

which contains some of the finest Byzantine frescoes in Crete and is located 1km before Kritsa.

The 7th-century-BC Dorian city of **Ancient Lato** (admission €2; ☉8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is one of Crete's few non-Minoan ancient sites and is located 4km to the north of Kritsa. Lato (lah-to), once a powerful city, sprawls over two acropolises in a lonely mountain setting overlooking the Gulf of Mirabello. Worshipped here were Artemis and Apollo, the children of Zeus and the goddess Leto, the latter of whom was the city's namesake.

When facing the gulf, you'll see stairway remains of a **theatre**. Above it was the *prytaneion*, where Lato's rulers met. The stone circle behind the (fenced-off) central well was a threshing floor; columns beside it were from the stoa, which stood in the *agora* (market). Mosaic remains lie nearby. A right-hand path accesses the **Temple of Apollo**.

There are no buses to Lato. The road to the site is signposted to the right on the approach to Kritsa. It's a 30-minute road walk through pleasant wooded countryside.

Another important site, Minoan **Gournia** (admission €3; ☉8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), pronounced goor-nyah, lies 19km southeast of Agios Nikolaos. Ruins here date from 1550-1450 BC and comprise a small palace and town. There are streets, stairways and houses with walls up to 2m high. Domestic, trade and agricultural implements discovered here indicate that Gournia was fairly prosperous.

Sitia and Ierapetra buses from Agios Nikolaos can drop you at the site.

Mohlos Μόχλος

POP 87

Tranquil Mohlos (*moh*-los) is a fishing village 5km down a winding road off the Sitia-Agios Nikolaos highway. In antiquity, it was joined to the small island that is now 200m offshore and was once a thriving Early Minoan community from the period 3000 BC to 2000 BC. Excavations still continue sporadically on both Mohlos Island and at Mohlos village.

Mohlos has a small pebble-and-grey-sand beach, simple accommodation and tavernas that enjoy a good reputation for fresh local fish and seafood. They are packed with locals on weekends to prove it.

Mohlos accommodation includes **Hotel Sofia** (☎28430 94554; sofia-mochlos@hotmail.com; r €35-45; 🏠) above the eponymous taverna. The smallish rooms have new furniture and bedding, plus fridges; the front ones boast sea-view balconies. **Mohlos Mare** (☎28430 94005; www.mochlos-mare.com; apt €50-80; 🏠), just outside the village, has spacious self-catering apartments with sea views from the balconies on the top floor. There's a communal outdoor kitchen and barbecue, and vines and vegetables flourish in the big garden, all framed by lovely rose bushes.

For eating, Cretans flock to waterfront **Ta Kochilia** (mains €4.50-16), which does great fish and seafood dishes, including a famous sea-urchin salad in summer. Meat eaters can enjoy lamb with artichokes in a lemon sauce and there are some satisfying vegetarian options as well.

Sitia Σητεία

POP 9257

Sitia (*si-tee*-ah) is an attractive seaside town with a big open harbour backed by a wide promenade lined with tavernas and cafes. It's a friendly place where tourism is fairly low key and where agriculture and commerce are the mainstays. A sandy beach skirts a wide bay to the east of town. Sitia attracts French and Greek tourists, but even at the height of high season the town retains its relaxed atmosphere.

Sitia is a good transit point for ferries to the Dodecanese islands.

Sights

Plateia Iroon Polytehniou is Sitia's main square. It's recognisable by its palm trees and statue of a dying soldier.

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(☎28430 23917; Piskokefalou; admission €2; ☀8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) This showcase of archaeological finds from the area has objects spanning the arc from neolithic to Roman times, with an emphasis on Minoan civilisation. One of the key items is the *Palekastro Kouros* – a figure painstakingly pieced together from fragments made of hippopotamus tusks and adorned with gold. Finds from the palace at Zakros include a wine press, a bronze saw and cult objects scorched by the conflagration that destroyed the palace. Among the most valuable objects are the Linear A tablets, which reflect the palace's administrative function.

FREE Venetian Fort

FORT

(☀8.30am-3pm) This towering structure, locally called *kazarma* (from the Venetian *casa di arma*), was a garrison under the Venetians. These are the only remains of the fortifications that once protected the town. The site is now used as an open-air venue.

Sleeping

Hotel Arhontiko

GUEST HOUSE €

(☎28430 28172; Kondylaki 16; s/d/studio €27/32/34; 🏠) A quiet location uphill from the port enhances the charm of this guest-house, situated in a neoclassical building. There's great period style and everything, from the entrance hall to the shared bathrooms, is spotlessly maintained.

Sitia Bay Hotel

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28430 24800 www.sitiabay.com; Paraliki Leoforos 8; apt & ste from €115; 🏠🚰🚿🛁) This modern hotel delivers personal and friendly service of the highest order. Most of the comfortable and tasteful one- and two-room apartments have sea views and there's a pool, hydrospa, mini-gym and sauna. Breakfast is €6.

Apostolis

PENSION €

(☎28430 22993/28172; Kazantzaki 27; s/d/tr €30/35/40) There are charming owners at these pleasant rooms on a quiet street. Rooms have ceiling fans and en-suite showers. There's a communal balcony and small kitchen with tea- and coffee-making facilities and a fridge.

TOP CHOICE Balcony

FUSION €€

(☎28430 25084; www.balcony-restaurant.com; Foundalidou 19; mains €12-19) Sitia's culinary pinnacle occupies the 1st floor of this neo-classical building, where owner-chef Tonya Karandinou infuses Cretan cuisine with Mexican and Asian influences (think grilled squid with a pistachio- and basil-based sauce). Fine Greek wines complement the dishes.

Sergiani

GREEK €€

(Karamanli 38; mains €6.50-8.50) On the quiet southern end of the waterfront, this traditional place uses well-sourced local ingredients and wood-burning cooking methods. The local fish is very good.

Oinodeion

GREEK €

(El Venizelou 157; mains €5-8) Kitted out with old-fashioned decor, this local place sits quietly alongside more glitzy cafes on the main waterfront. There's a good range of mezedhes, such as snails in vinegar sauce, and meat and fish standards.

 Information

Several ATMs are available in the centre of town.

Java Internet Cafe (Kornarou 113; per hr €2; ☎9am-late)

Post office (Dimokritou; ☎7.30am-3pm) Heading inland, the first left off Venizelou.

Tourist office (☎28430 28300; Karamanli; ☎9.30am-2.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat) On the promenade.

Tourist police (☎28430 24200; Therisou 31) At the main police station.

 Getting There & Away

Air

Sitia's airport has an expanded international-size runway but at the time of writing there were still no international flights. For domestic flights, see the table on p260.

Boat

Ferries dock 500m north of Plateia Agnostou and serve Karpathos, Kassos, Milos and Piraeus. For details, see the table on p260.

Bus

The bus station is at the eastern end of Karamanli, behind the bay. The buses to Vaï and Kato Zakros only run from May to October. For a detailed schedule, consult <http://bus-service-crete-ktel.com>.

BUS SERVICES FROM AGIOS SITIA

DESTINATION	DURATION	FARE	FREQUENCY
Agios Nikolaos	1½hr	€7.60	7 daily
Ierapetra	1½hr	€6.30	6 daily
Iraklio	3hr	€14.70	7 daily
Kato Zakros	1hr	€4.80	2 daily
Palekastro	45min	€2.80	2 daily
Vai	30min	€3.60	4 daily
Zakros	1hr	€5.20	2 daily

Around Sitia

MONI TOPLOU MONH TOIHAOU

The defences of the imposing fortresslike **Moni Toplou** (☎28430 61226; admission €3; ☎10am-5pm Apr-Oct, Fri only Nov-Mar), 18km east of Sitia, were tested by all from crusading knights to the Turks. The monastery's star attraction is undoubtedly the icon *Lord Thou Art Great* by celebrated Cretan artist Ioannis Kornaros. Each of the 61 scenes painted on the icon is beautifully worked out and inspired by a phrase from the Orthodox prayer. More priceless icons, engravings, books and resistance-era military gear are exhibited in the monastery's **museum**. Ecclesiastical souvenirs, books on Crete, and the monastery's award-winning organic olive oil and wine are sold in the shop.

The monastery is a 3km walk from the Sitia-Palekastro road. Buses can drop you off at the junction.

VAI BAI

The beach at Vaï, on Crete's east coast 24km from Sitia, is famous for the large grove of *Phoenix theophrastii* palms that lies behind it. The word *vaï* is a local term for palm fronds. One explanation for the presence of the palms is that they sprouted from date pits spread by Egyptian soldiers, Roman legionaries or feasting pirates.

In July and August, you'll need to arrive early to appreciate both palms and beach – the place gets packed and the beach is soon covered in sun beds and umbrellas (€6).

At the south end of the beach, stone steps lead up to a gazebo lookout. From here a rocky path eventually descends to a less crammed beach about 1km away; otherwise, head over the hill to the north of Vaï Beach to a series of clothes-optional coves.

The **Restaurant-Cafeteria Vai** (mains €5-7.50) is reasonable, although busy, of course.

There are buses to Vaï from Sitia (€3.70, one hour, five daily) from May to October. There is one car park where buses stop, and a few hundred metres further on is a beach-side car park. Parking is €3.

PALEKASTRO ΠΑΛΑΙΚΑΣΤΡΟ

POP 1380

Palekastro (pah-*leh*-kas-tro) is an unpretentious farming village underpinned with low-key tourism and lies on the road connecting Vaï and the Zakros ruins. It too has a promising archaeological site about 1km from town: Ancient Palekastro, where a major Minoan palace is possibly buried. The celebrated *Palekastro Kouros* in Sitia's Archaeological Museum was found there; digging continues. Nearby, the nearly deserted **Kouremenos Beach** offers excellent windsurfing, while **Hiona Beach** has good fish tavernas. **Freak Surf Station** (☎28430 61116; www.freak-surf.com) on Kouremenos rents boards.

Digs include **Hotel Hellas** (☎28430 61240; hellas_h@otenet.gr; d €45; ☹), which has basic rooms with fridges and good bathrooms; the downstairs **taverna** (mains €4-8) serves hearty, home-style cooking. Also popular is **Taverna Mythos** (mains €5.50-8), which has a big vegetarian mezedhes selection and traditional *mayirefta* and grilled fish and meats.

The **tourist office** (☎28430 61546; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri May-Oct) has information on rooms and transport; it sits next to an ATM.

There are five buses per day from Sitia that stop at Palekastro on the way to Vaï. There are also two buses daily from Sitia to Palekastro (€2.80, 45 minutes) that continue to Kato Zakros (€5.20, one hour).

Kato Zakros & Ancient Zakros Ζάκρος & Κάτω Ζάκρος

POP 912

The village of Zakros (*zah*-kros), 45km southeast of Sitia, is the starting point for the trail through the Zakros Gorge, known as the **Valley of the Dead** for the ancient burial sites in the caves honeycombing the canyon walls. Zakros, however, is a mere prelude to Kato Zakros in a coastal setting 7km down a winding road through rugged terrain. Halfway down it loops left to reveal a vast curtain of mountains and

the red jaws of the **Zakros Gorge** breaching the cliffs. On the low ground behind the pebbly beach and its huddle of tavernas, the remarkable ruins of the Minoan **Zakros Palace** (☎28430 26897; Kato Zakros; admission €3; ☎8am-7.30pm Jul-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Jun) are clearly defined. The smallest of Crete's four palace complexes was an important major Minoan port, doing commerce with Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Cyprus. The palace comprised royal apartments, storerooms and workshops flanking a central courtyard.

Ancient Zakros occupied a low plain near the shore; however, rising water levels have since submerged parts of the palace – it is now literally living under a *helonokratia* (rule of turtles). While the ruins are sparse, the wildness and remoteness of the setting make it attractive.

Sleeping & Eating

Stella's Traditional Apartments

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28430 23739; www.stelapts.com; studios €60-80; ☹) Close to the wooded mouth of the Zakros Gorge, these charming self-contained studios sport distinctive wooden furniture and artefacts made by co-owner Elias Pagiannides. There are hammocks under the trees, barbecues and an external kitchen with an honesty system for supplies. Elias has excellent knowledge and experience of hiking trails and other outdoor activities around the area.

Terra Minoika

VILLAS €€

(☎28430 23739; www.stelapts.com; villa € 120; ☹) The owners of Stella's are also the masterminds behind this small complex of stone-walled villas that seems to grow naturally from the rocky slopes above Kato Zakros. The houses mix interior modernism and luxury with a great sense of place. Sheltered courtyards and balconies add to the character and there's even a fully equipped gym.

Kato Zakros Palace

APARTMENTS €€

(☎28430 29550; www.palaikaistro.com/katozakros palace; s/d €50/60; ☹) High on the slopes above Kato Zakros Beach, these rooms and studios have cooking facilities and a guests' laundry room. Views are predictably stunning.

Akrogiali Taverna

SEAFOOD, CRETAN €

(mains €5.50-10) Enjoy the seaside ambience while you tuck into fish dishes and decent house wine, with other classic Cretan options available.

Kato Zakros Bay

GREEK €€

(mains €4.50-9) Local produce forms the basis of this popular eatery's Greek staples that include rabbit *stifadho*, a stew that includes tomatoes and red wine. It's also noted for its fish dishes and vegetarian options.

i Getting There & Away

Zakros is served by two daily buses from Sitia via Palekastro (€4.50, one hour). In summer, these continue to Kato Zakros (€5.20, one hour, 20 minutes).

Ierapetra Ιεράπετρα

POP 15.323

Ierapetra (yeh-rah-pet-rah) is a cheerful, down-to-earth seafront town and the commercial centre of southeastern Crete's substantial greenhouse-based agribusiness. It has a lot to offer and an impressive history with interludes as a Roman port for conquering Egypt and a Venetian stronghold based on the still standing harbour fortress. Turkish quarter remnants attest to Ierapetra's Ottoman past.

This hot and dusty place offers a more authentic Cretan experience than the northeastern coast resorts. Tavernas and cafes line the waterfront and nightlife is busy in summer. Local beaches are fairly good, and sandy, semitropical Gaïdouronisi Island (also called Hrysi) lies offshore.

o Sights & Activities

Ierapetra's main **town beach** is near the harbour, while a second **beach** stretches east from Patriarhou Metaxaki. Both have coarse grey sand, but the main beach has more shade.

Archaeological Collection

MUSEUM €

(☎28420 28721; Adrianou 2; admission €2; ☎8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) Ierapetra's small but worthwhile archaeological collection occupies a former school from the Ottoman period. A highlight among a collection of headless classical statuary is an intact 2nd-century-AD statue of the goddess Persephone. Another splendid piece is a big larnax (clay coffin), dated around 1300

BC that is decorated with 12 painted panels showing hunting scenes, an octopus and a chariot procession.

FREE Medieval Fortress

CASTLE

(admission free; ☎8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) South along the waterfront is the medieval fortress, built in the early years of Venetian rule and strengthened by Francesco Morosini in 1626. There are grand views to the eastern mountains from above.

🛏 Sleeping**TOP CHOICE El Greco**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎28420 28471; Markopoulou 8; www.elgreco-iera.gr; s €65-80, d €85-100, incl breakfast; 🍷🍷) A complete refurbishment has transformed this waterfront building into a boutique hotel with stylish and comfortable rooms. There's a cafe-bar and restaurant on the ground floor (mains €5 to €12).

Cretan Villa Hotel

ROOMS €

(☎28420 28522; www.cretan-villa.com; Lakerda 16; s €40, d €44-50; 🍷🍷) This well-maintained 18th-century house manages to create a charming, almost rural, character at the heart of town. The traditionally furnished rooms cluster round a peaceful courtyard. It's only a few minutes' walk from the bus station.

Ersi Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎28420 23208; Plateia Eleftherias 19; s/d €30/40; 🍷) Ersi offers fair-value rooms at the heart of town, though some are a touch compact.

Coral Hotel

HOTEL €

(☎28420 27755; Katzonovatsi 12; s/d €30/40) This is another reasonable budget option in a quiet pocket of the old town.

🍴 Eating**I Kalitexnes**

MIDDLE EASTERN €

(Kyprou 26; mains €4-7; closed Sun) This quirky little place is known for its classic Greek dishes prepared with organic ingredients alongside spicy falafel and kebabs introduced by the Egyptian owner.

Napoleon

CRETAN €€

(Stratigou Samouil 26; mains €4.50-8) This is one of the oldest and most popular establishments in town. A mixed fish plate is a good choice, as is the cuttlefish in wine.

Ierapetra has a tradition of *rakadika*, relaxed evening hang-outs where a carafe of

raki or wine comes with half a dozen or more mezedhes, making it a good-value slow-dining experience. You could try **To Kafeneio** opposite the town hall, the popular **Ntoukiani** in Ethnikis Antistaseos or the modern reincarnation **Pavlis**, near the port, where for €3 per carafe you get six or seven plates of mezedhes.

i Information

ATMs line the main square.

Ierapetra Express (☎28420 28673; express@ier.forthnet.gr; Kothri 2) Central tourist office with friendly service and good information.

Post office (Giannakou 1; ☎7.30am-2pm)

i Getting There & Away

The bus station is just back from the beachfront and has nine daily buses serving Iraklio (€11, 2½ hours) via Agios Nikolaos (€3.80, one hour) and Gournia (€1.90, 40 minutes). Seven each go to Sitia (€6.30, 1½ hours) and Myrtos (€2.20, 30 minutes).

Around Ierapetra

GAÏDOURONISI (HRYSI) ΓΑΪΔΑΡΟΥΝΗΣΙ (ΧΡΥΣΗ)

The tranquil Gaidouronisi (Donkey Island), marketed as Hrysi (Golden Island), has nice

sandy beaches, a taverna and Lebanon cedars – the only such stand in Europe. It can get very crowded when the tour boats are in, but you can always find a quiet spot.

In summer, **excursion boats** for Gaidouronisi leave from the quay every morning and return in the afternoon. Most travel agents around the quay sell tickets (about €20).

MYRTOS MYPTOE

POP 622

Myrtos (myr-tos) lies 14km west of Ierapetra. It has a devoted clientele who swear by the area's easygoing and creative vibe. No big resort-style hotels mar the decent patch of beach.

For overnight stays, try **Big Blue** (☎28420 51094; www.big-blue.gr; d/apt €40/85, studio €45-75; ☎), which has large airy studios with sea views and cheaper ground-floor rooms, all with cooking facilities. Breakfast starts at €5.

Taverna Myrtos (dishes €4-7), attached to the eponymous hotel, specialises in mezedhes, while the more tourist-gear **Platanos** (mains €4.50-8), beneath a giant plane tree, is a focus of village social life and has live music on many summer evenings. It offers reliable Cretan staples.

Seven daily buses go from Ierapetra to Myrtos (€2.20, 20 minutes).

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