

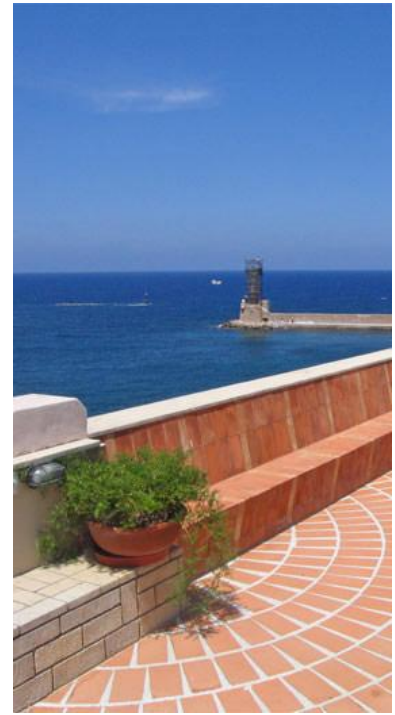
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Guide of Crete



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1. ABOUT THEHOTEL.GR TRAVEL AGENCY

TheHotel.gr Travel Agency has been operating with its experienced and well trained team for nearly 10 years and has been acknowledged in the Greek travel industry as one of the most reliable organizations in Travel and Tourism.

We are always ready to deal your smaller wish guaranteeing you the best possible result at the most reasonable price. Our goal is to provide you with the absolute best experience every time you call or visit one of our hotels or villas.

Every destination and tour itinerary is thoroughly researched ensuring that you get the best sightseeing, accommodation and value. Our properties are chosen and checked regularly by our team on the ground to make sure they live up to the high standards our customers expect.

Our years of experience have shown us time and time again that the one-on-one customer service provided by our travel agency is the best method for delivering the unique experience to all our customers.

TheHotel.gr Travel Agency is registered in the Greek National Tourism Organisation (EOT) under the number 1042 E 6061 00935 01. Our main office is located in the centre of the picturesque town of Chania in west Crete, southwest of the famous Chania old town.

You can call us at 0030 28210 36122 or you can email us through our contact and booking forms - we will be happy to reply within 24 hours.

For all of us at TheHotel.gr Travel Agency, your vacation is the most important element of the end-to-end customer experience.

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2. WHY BOOK WITH US

OUR COMPANY

TheHotel.gr Travel Agency is a local, Cretan firm specialized in suggesting the best Hotels, Apartments and Villas in Crete and in Aegean and helping all our guests to choose the most suitable accommodation for their holidays. Moreover, we are a lawful travel agency registered in the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) under the license number: 1042 E6061 0093501. If you want a firsthand account of how we operate, please take a look at the reviews of our guests!

YOU ARE OUR PRIORITY

Building a relationship with you, satisfying your needs and exceeding your expectations is extremely important to us. We do this so well, that the majority of our clients are either repeat clients or referred by friends, family and colleagues who have travelled with us before.

PERSONALIZED SERVICE

Travel is about details so we believe in a personal relationship with every guest. Our travel experts are friendly, helpful and above all, knowledgeable and professional. Each member of our team is highly trained and always on hand to offer practical support and advice about the holidays and destinations we offer. If issues do arise you're not alone. We make sure your voice is heard and problems are quickly resolved.

EMPOWERMENT

Every destination and tour itinerary is thoroughly researched ensuring that you get the best sightseeing, accommodation and value. Our properties are chosen and checked regularly by our team on the ground to make sure they live up to the high standards our customers expect.

SAVINGS

Your travel agent brings you destination expertise, discounted hotel rates, villas, car rental deals and exclusive specials and promotions. Helping you determine your budget and distilling your options is the first relief that comes when working with TheHotel.gr.

BOOK WITH CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY

We provide a secure and easy online multi-currency payment system that protects your details and information. There is no need to worry about exposure to credit card fraud or identity theft by faxing personal details, copies of credit cards or banking details. There is also no hassle with bank wires or electronic transfers.

For all of us at TheHotel.gr Travel Agency, your vacation is the most important element of the end-to-end customer experience.

Ready when you are!

3. GREECE

Greece is the place where was created one of the most important civilizations which has strongly affected the contemporary civilization.

Tourists visit Greece to explore the long sandy and pebble beaches, the beautiful landscape and the gorgeous summer sunsets, the excellent traditional cuisine, the nightlife, the hospitality in remote villages and small islands, the blue sea, the endless blue sky, and the ruminants of ancient Greece.

4. CRETE

Crete lies at the center of the eastern Mediterranean basin, where the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa meet. It is the largest Greek island, the fifth largest in the Mediterranean, it covers an area of 8,336 square km and it stretches 257 km along an east-west axis. Its population is a little more than 601,131 people (2001 report) and it is divided in four prefectures; Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion and Lasithi (west to east, map). Crete has 1,046.4 km long coastline, 155 km of which are sandy beaches. The most cosmopolitan are located on the north whereas the naturally purest ones (Elafonisi, Balos, Triopetra, Vai) on the south and the west.



Heraklion (200,000 citizens) is the capital of the island, Chania (70,000 citizens with its extended surroundings) is the second largest city, while Rethymno (40,000 citizens) and Agios Nikolaos (10,000 citizens) are

the next two bigger towns of the island. The **old towns** of **Chania** and **Rethymno** exhibit fine examples of Venetian architecture and urban design, creating two very picturesque waterfronts to explore and relax. There are numerous small taverns, bars, restaurants and small Hotels in the old towns of Chania and Rethymno, ideal for more romantic holidays.

Crete's history dates back well over 4,000 years and it has been labeled "the birthplace of civilization". Sir Arthur Evans excavated the Minoan site of **Knossos**, a Bronze Age settlement circa 3000 BC. The Palace at Knossos is the finest surviving example of Minoan architecture. In addition to seeing Knossos, you can visit **Heraklion's archeological museum**, where artifacts from Knossos and other Minoan settlements are displayed.



Crete is famous for its flora and fauna, too. The **Samaria Gorge** in the Chania district is the longest in Europe and many endangered species live there (Kri-Kri, Lammergeier). Moreover, there are a few fantastic sandy

beaches in remote areas of Crete; **Falassarna** and **Balos** (west of Chania), **Elafonisi** (south of Chania), **Preveli** (south of Rethymno), **Vai** (east of Sitia).

The busiest and most lively villages are located on the north part of the island. You can choose between *Platanias*, *Agia Marina*, *Stalos* and *Kalamaki* west of Chania, *Georgioupolis* east of Chania, *Platanes*, *Stavromenos*, *Adelianos Kampos*, and *Bali* east of Rethymno, *Agia Pelagia* west of Heraklion as well as *Malia*, *Hersonissos* and *Stalida* east of Heraklion.

The quietest and more traditional villages are located on the south part of Crete and in the *area of Lasithi* in the east Crete. However, there are also a few villages with mixed character in every area of Crete. These villages are previous fishing or rural villages which have been slowly converted to touristic villages, offering great chances to relax, swim and enjoy your holidays in a more traditional and simpler way. You can try *Kalives*, *Almirida*, *Tersanas*, and *Stavros* in Chania area, *Sfakaki*, *Scaletta*, *Bali*, and *Panormo* in Rethymno area, *Lygaria*, *Kokini Chani* and *Gouves* in Heraklion, as well as *Mohlos*, *Palaikastro* and *Xerokambos* in Lasithi area.

Elounda, in the area of Lasithi, is the most cosmopolitan and the most expensive destination of Crete. It is located in east Crete, 10 km north of Agios Nikolaos and 65 km from Heraklion, being a renowned tourism resort, famous for its beautiful scenery and luxury Hotels and Villas. The once picturesque fishing village in Mirabello Bay faces the dramatic *Spinalonga Peninsula*.

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Also famous is the small **islet of Spinalonga** in the entrance of Elounda harbour. The Venetian fortress which was built in 1579 is now uninhabited, and it was once used as a leper colony. There is a boat connection to Spinalonga about every half an hour.

Crete Golf Club (+30 2897026000) is the only 18-Hole Course on the island of Crete! The Crete Golf Club is located approximately 24 km east of the International Airport of Heraklion.

The **Aquarium of Crete** (+30 2810337788) is located 14 km east of Heraklion airport. It is open from 09:30 to 21:00 from May to September and from 09:30 to 17:00 during the rest months. The aquarium building lies about 100 meters from a long sandy bathing beach.

Crete has a fine tradition of excellent, *traditional food*. From ancient times the islanders have relied on the use of fresh, seasonal produce, free range meats, fish and seafood, aromatic herbs and good olive oil and wine. *Olive oil* is used liberally and imparts its own distinctive taste. *Bread* remains a staple foodstuff and is often made without any preservatives, using unbleached flour, hence the yellow appearance and tendency for a short 'shelf-life'. *Salad stuffs* - tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers and peppers - are usually available all year round due to the tremendous expansion of the green house industry that has sprouted in many parts of Crete. *Meat* forms the basis for some classic dishes, such as keftethes (meatballs), stifado and *moussaka*. *Lamb*, chicken, pork, mutton, goat, rabbit and beef are widely eaten, either spit-roasted, grilled, baked or casseroleed. *Fish* is generally more expensive, with the exception of octopus, squid, swordfish, sardines and whitebait.

Many great artists, writers and politicians were born in Crete and were inspired by its history and landscape. **Nikos Kazantzakis**, the author of *Zorba the Greek* and **Domenikos Theotokopoulos**, more commonly known as "**El Greco**", were Cretans. Moreover, **Eleftherios Venizelos** who was one of the most significant politicians of modern Greece was born in Mournies near Chania, Crete.

Cretan tradition is hard to be found in the tourist resorts of the island. You can visit on the small villages on the slopes of the White Mountains, Psiloritis and Dikte. Here people continue to live with their customs and the beliefs of the past so that they keep their traditions alive.

TheHotel.gr since 2011 also arranges holidays in other Aegean islands (**Santorini, Rhodes, Paros, Mykonos, Naxos, Kos**) and in **Athens!**

AREAS OF NATURAL BEAUTY



1. The White Mountains, Chania area

The White Mountains or Lefka Ori are located in the centre of West Crete. They are called White Mountains because they are covered in snow until late in the spring and during the summer the sun is reflected on the limestone summits and makes them appear white as well. The highest summit is Pachnes (2453m). They are regarded as having the best walks of all mountains in the island. The White Mountains are well known due to the Samaria Gorge, the longest gorge in Europe.

2. Elafonisi, Chania area

Elafonisi is an extremely small island located south-west of Chania. It is a tiny islet connected with the land through a lagoon of turquoise water. It is very easily accessible on foot, because only a shallow canal, at about 800 meters long, divides Elafonisi from the nearest Cretan coast. It is a peaceful place full of colours, light and white sand. The place reminds of exotic paradise, because of the golden sand and the almost white waters. Elafonisi is one of the most popular destinations in Crete.

3. Falassarna, Chania area

It is regarded as one of the nicest beaches in Crete and it is located 16 km west of Kastelli. It is a long, big, sandy, natural beach with amazing views during the sunset. It gives the impression that it is not really organised even though there is a beach bar at the start and umbrellas and loungers at different locations.

4. Balos Beach, Chania area

North of Falasarna is the wild and remote Gramvoussa peninsula. The peninsula is formed by steep rocks and is covered with thyme and origanum bushes and wild flowers.

On the north-west side of the peninsula, opposite to the island of Gramvoussa, is the wonderful beach of Balos. It is covered with fine white sand, and the sea has an emerald colour. The road to the beach stops 1-2 km before it and the visitor has to follow a paved road with nice views to reach the beach.

5. Lake Kournas, Chania area

It is the only natural lake in the island. The landscape is fine and the vegetation dense. There is a mix of bushes, reeds and brambles around it and some olive trees on its south side. A cafe and taverna can offer you some rest and food.

6. Imbros Gorge, Chania area

It is a very picturesque gorge, six kilometers long, which can be walked in four hours. It extends between the villages of Komitades and Imbros, cutting through the western fringes of the White Mountains.

7. Kourtaliotiko Gorge, Rethymno area

The Gorge begins in the village of Koxare and follows the Kourtaliotiko River, as does the road. The Gorge is named by the noises (rattle) caused by the strong north wind. It is narrow and the landscape is very beautiful; the river that flows through it forms five big pools and then a waterfall. At the end of the Gorge there is an enchanting beach with crystal clear water from which cliffs with palm trees rise to the right and the left. Near the Palm Beach a path leads to the magnificent Monastery of Preveli.

8. Lake Votamos (Zaros), Lasithi area

It is a picturesque lake surrounded by barren, flinty slopes. There are tavernas near the shore which serve trout from the lake.

9. Lasithi area

Lasithi is located in the east Crete and it is regarded as the 'Plain of Windmills' even though very few of the thousands of white-sailed windmills still work. The contrast of fertile fields, gardens and orchards with the treeless grey slopes surrounding it is very impressive.

10. Aspros River, Lasithi area

Aspros River forms a very nice valley which opens into the sea at the east end of Makrygialos beach (south-east Crete).

11. Vai, Lasithi area

Vai is located on the north-east Crete. There is the only natural palm-tree forest in Europe which is already designated as an 'Aesthetic Forest'. The palm trees (Phoenix theophrasti) may have been planted by Arabs or ancient Phoenicians. The forest is located at the eastern part of Crete, a few kilometres north of the Palaiokastro village. This particular palm is known as one of the two non-epigenetic species of the palm family in Europe (the other one occurs in the Canary Islands).

ANCIENT SITES



1. Knossos, Heraklion area

It is the most famous of the palaces of the Minoan civilization. It was destroyed possibly by a volcanic eruption about 1450 BC. The ancient Knossos was the hub of the Minoan Civilization which imposed the Aegean 4000 years ago. According to mythology, the palace was the seat of the king Minos. It is also connected with intriguing legends, such as the myth of the Minotaur in the Labyrinth under the Palace, and the story of Daidalos and Ikaros.

The Palace of Knossos is the largest and the most spectacular of all the Minoan palatial centres. The Palace spread over 20,000 square meters (2 hectares) of land with heights reaching four stories. It was constructed in a labyrinth-like pattern and it provided housing for about 100,000 people. Colourful friezes and frescoes, figures and paintings on plaster fill the walls of the palace and exhibit life from this era. There are varying pictures from animals and people to gods and various ceremonies, which depict an advanced and sophisticated society. Further examination of the Palace's interior decoration reveals that war was not a common theme and women were depicted almost as frequently as men.

2. Phaestos, Heraklion area

It is another palace of the Minoan civilization built around 1600 BC. Its ruins (a maze of walls and courtyards) are second only to those at Knossos. The site of Phaestos is preserved in its natural state. The unique clay disc from Phaestos (dating from 1600 BC) is one of the most valuable exhibits in the Museum of Heraklion since it is one of the oldest examples of hieroglyphic writing ever found and it is believed to record a hymn to the goddess Rhea.

3. Gortys, Heraklion area

The site contains the ruins of the city of Gortys, with basilica, the remnants of a Roman provincial governor's palace which dates from the early Christian era, and the ruins of the

acropolis and the odium of the ancient Gortys. The Basilica of Agios Titos is one of the oldest and most important monuments of Christianity in Crete and it was the seat of the first bishops of the Cretan Church.

4. Aptera, Chania area

Aptera was one of the most important city-states of Crete. According to the legend Aptera (meaning wingless) named after the defeat of the Sirens in a music contest. The Muses cut the Sirens' wings and when they tried to fly, they fell into the water and formed the small islands in Souda bay.

The first epigraphic occurrence of Aptera is found in the Linear B tablets (14th - 13th century B.C.). It became a very important city-state during Greek times and it was involved on the Cretan wars. The city flourished until the 7th century A.D. when an earthquake destroyed it. Its ideal location was determinative for its development in an important commercial and political center. Aptera was able to control the naval activity by harbors, Kissamos and Minoa, located on both sides of Suda Bay.

The era of the city's greatest peak was the early Hellenistic period (late 4th - 3th century B.C.). At that time Aptera begins to mint its own coins and develops diplomatic relations with important centers of the Hellenistic world. During the period of roman occupation it appears to have developed a more rural character. Habitation at the site continued into the early byzantine period. After the 7th century destruction, the monastery of Saint John the Theologan was established in the central area of the city and it officiated until 1964.

The ruins which are exhibited in the site come from different historic periods: enormous Roman cisterns, foundations of a Demeter temple, a Dorian temple, a Hellenistic Apollo temple are interspersed with a Byzantine cloister and a large Turkish castle.

5. Gournia, Lasithi area

It is one of the oldest sites, dating from 3000 BC and it is the best preserved Minoan town in Crete. However, it was a town of workers with their workshops surrounded by a small palace.

6. Agia Triada, Heraklion area

It is located 3 Kms west of Phaestos and it is an L-shaped Minoan Villa. Here it was found a treasury of Minoan relics such as tablets.

7. Malia, Heraklion area

3 km east of the famous Malia there is an ancient palace site.

8. Zakros, Lasithi area

Remains of fourth greatest Minoan Palace and a cistern can be seen.

9. Praisos, Lasithi area

Here you can see the remnants of a temple, house foundations and a city wall. It was the last enclave of the descendants of the Minoans (Eretocretans).

10. Itanos, Lasaiti area

It is the location of a flourishing city until the Medieval Time. Here there are the remains of a Hellenistic Wall, of two early Basilicas as well as toppled walls and columns.

MONASTERIES AND CHURCHES



1. Arkadi Monastery, Rethymno area

The 16th century Monastery of Moni Arkadiou (located 23 km south-east of Rethymno) is a great symbol of Crete. During the revolution of 1866, around 900 Cretans (fighters and locals) took refuge here. Instead of surrendering they preferred to blow up their gunpowder stores killing themselves and many of the Turks. 3,000 Turks and Egyptians were killed in the whole battle.

The tragedy echoed around the world, but it would take another 30 years before Crete could become free. Every year on the 8th of November, which is a national day of remembrance of this tragedy, hundreds of Cretans gather at the monastery to pay tribute to the martyrs (Tel: 0030 28310 83076).

2. Panagia Kera Church, Lasithi area

The three-nave Church of Panagia Kera (Our Lady Kera) is situated 9 kilometres south-west of Agios Nikolaos, nearby the village of Kritsa. It was built in the 13th and 14th centuries and it is the most important Byzantine-era church. It is dedicated to the Virgin and the Saints Anthony and Anna and it is adorned with many important Byzantine frescoes of the 14th and 15th century related to the two Saints as well as 14 scenes portraying the secret life of the Virgin Mary after Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection. Since the church was built in several stages the frescoes follow and exhibit the development and trends of the Cretan school of painting. Opening times are from 9 am to 2 pm (Tel: 0030 28410 51525).

3. Toplou Monastery, Lasithi area

The impressive fortified monastery of Toplou is located 16 kilometres north-east of Siteia and it is built in the 15th century. In the church of the Monastery it is housed one of the greatest Cretan works of religious Art, the icon Lord, Thou Are Great by Ioannis Kornaros.

Toplou is also famous for its history since it has experienced many attacks of bandits and other invading forces, which has affected its exterior architecture (solid and thick walls, massive door-entrance with a hole above it). In the Monastery there is also a cannon from which it was named (Toplou means 'with a cannon' in Turkish) (Tel: 0030 28430 61226).

4. Agia Triada Monastery, Akrotiri, Chania area

It is located in the Akrotiri peninsula, 16 kilometers from Chania, in the northwest part of Akrotiri and it is placed in the green. Although the community decreases the old buildings are gradually restored. All the visitors are welcomed and you can buy traditional olive oil from the monks.

The monastery of Agia Triada (Holy Trinity) was built in the seventeenth century on top of a pre-existing church designed by Byzantine cruciform architecture with three domes. The main church is dedicated to the Agia Triada and the two side chapels to Agios Ioannis Prodromos and to Zoodocho Pighi (Source of Life). The facade of the church has double columns of Ionic and Corinthian style and an inscription. The monastery's museum has manuscripts and important portable icons from the 15th, 16th, 17th and subsequent centuries.

The approach to the Monastery is really impressive through an amazing landscape of olive trees and grapevines as well a stand in cypresses trees (Tel: 0030 28210 63310).

5. Gouverneto Monastery, Akrotiri, Chania area

It is located 5 kilometers north of Agia Triada Monastery, deep in the wild and bareen Akrotiri peninsula. It is a fortress-type complex with a square tower on each of its four corners. The rectangular courtyard is dominated by a domes church dedicated to the virgin. In the chapel in the small courtyard of the Moni there are some of the oldest frescoes in Crete (Tel: 0030 28430 63319).

6. Preveli Monastery, Rethymno area

It was built during the 17th century to replace a more remote monastery building. It forms a courtyard with a 19-th century church and a small museum. Exhibits include lavishly ornamented vestments, censers and icons (Tel: 0030 28320 31246).

7. Agioi Deka Church, Heraklion area

It is a 13-th century church which stands on the point where ten Cretan Christians were martyred by the troops of the Roman emperor Decius in AD 250. In the nave there is a striking icon depicting the ten saints with golden haloes.

8. Chrissopigi Monastery, Chania area

It looks more like a castle than a religious dwelling. It is relatively new, built in 1863, and it has a studio in which icons are painted using age-old techniques (Tel: 0030 28210 91125).

9. Chrysoskalitissa Monastery, Akrotiri, Chania area

It is a beautiful Monastery built on a rock high above the sea. It is a thousand years old and it may have been built on the site of a Minoan temple. Chrysoskalitissa means 'golden staircase'. According to the tradition, the top step to the Monastery was golden and it could be seen only by the faithful ones. According to the monks one of the 90 steps was hollow and it was used to hide the treasure of the Monastery, hence the name. It was used to pay the taxes imposed by the Ottoman rulers.

10. Katholiko Monastery, Akrotiri, Chania area

It is the most ancient monastery on Crete, dating back to the eleventh century. The monastery became a place of formal worship in the thirteenth century. About three hundred years ago, the monks abandoned the monastery because of persistent pirate raids. The monastery, built into the sides of a ravine, contains a church dedicated to Agios Ioannis Xenos, or St. John the Hermit, the founder of the monastery, who lived and died in the nearby cave that bears his name. The church itself is carved into the rock of the mountain side, and its facade lines up with the slope of the mountain. The bridge across the ravine, and some buildings of the old monastery are still preserved. The view is amazing.

11. Agios Nikolaos Monastery, town of Chania

It was built by the Venetians around 1320 AD. The church was a single-aisle basilica with a wooden, E-shaped roof and an east-west orientation. It was converted into a mosque after the Turkish conquest and it acquired a minaret with two balconies on the southwest corner of its façade. In the start of the 20th century it was converted again into a Greek Orthodox church dedicated to Agios Nikolaos.

VENETIAN CASTLES IN CRETE



1. Rethymno town, Fortezza Fortress

One of the largest Venetian castles is located at the place where the ancient acropolis was, overlooking the sea and the town. This fortress was built from 1573 till 1580 by the Venetians, for the protection of the inhabitants by the Turkish threat and the pirate raids. During the battle with the Turks the fortress could not resist the gigantic canon of the Ottoman Empire and finally it collapsed. Its geometry looks like star with three gates and six bastions. In the middle of the walls there was the church of St Nicolo, which later turned into the Mosque of the Sultan Ibrahim Han. There were also the Commander's house, the Counsellor's house, barracks, stables, ammunition - storehouses, a cistern and houses which were later destroyed. Some years earlier, the 13th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities made works of restoration and consolidation.

2. Chania town, Venetian Fortress

The Firkas Bastion is located at the western end of the outer harbour and today it houses the Naval Museum. It was built by the Venetians (with the walls perimetrically of the hill) to protect the town inside the walls from Turks and the corsairs. Eleftherios Venizelos and King Constantine officially raised the Greek flag here in 1913. During the summer months, the Firkas bastion is host to concerts and plays.

3. Heraklion town, Venetian Fortress

It was built by the Venetians to protect the city from Turks and Corsairs. When the city passed in the Venetians' hands they improved on the ditch which surrounded the city by building enormous fortifications, most of which are still in place, including a giant wall (up to

40m thick with 7 bastions) and the fortress in the harbour. The city fell to Turks after a 22-year siege in a bloody war in which 30,000 Cretans and 120,000 Turks died in 1669.

4. Frangokastello, Chania area

The castle was built by the Venetians to protect the south coast of Crete from the Saracens pirates. It is famous since it is related to the 1821 (18th May) battle that took place between few Cretans and the Turkish army. A small force of six hundred brave Cretan men was slaughtered, along with their leader, Hadjimichalis Dalianis when he chose to remain inside the castle wall. Dalianis was beheaded and his head sent to the Turkish Pasha. The bones of the soldiers are said to be below the sand that comprises the floor of the castle. According to the legend the ghosts of the rebels appear every year on the 17th of May and walk from the sea towards the fortress to reclaim it.

5. Spinalonga, Elounda, Lasithi area

It was built by the Venetians in 1579 to control the entrance to the Gulf of Mirabello. It was one of the strongest castles in Crete and during the 17th century it was a refuge for Christians fleeing from the Turks. Finally in 1715 it fell in the hands of Turks by treaty (Irakleion had already fallen by 1669). It was used as a leper colony after the Turks left the island. Today several daily boat trips from Agios Nikolaos visit the island.

The name of the island is of linguistic interest. The word Spinalonga is Italian and means long thorn (Spina-longa). The Venetians called it so because they adapted to their own language a Greek composite word "Stinelounda" meaning "to Elounda" (sten-Elounda).

6. Aptera Castle, Chania area

Aptera Turkish fortress is located on a hilltop near the ruins of Byzantine Aptera. The view is magnificent on the whole Souda peninsula.

7. Sitia Venetian Fortress, Lasithi area

It was built by the Venetians to protect the island from Turks. It resisted three years siege in 1648-51. The Venetian fortress "Kazarma" (named after the Italian caserma -barracks) overlooks Sitia and plays host to several concerts and other performance events-plays during the July and August.

8. Venetian Paleochora Castle, Chania area

It was built in 1279 to control the southwest of Crete against the corsairs. It was destroyed by the Turkish corsair Barbarossa in 1539. The outside of the fortress is well preserved until today. It has named after the town which is located there.

FAMOUS CRETANS

1. Eleftherios Venizelos (1864-1936), Greek statesman and diplomat

Eleftherios Venizelos was probably the most significant politician of modern Greece. Born at Mournies, a village near Chania, he studied law in Athens and he became the leader of the Liberal Party in Crete. He became famous in the 1889 and 1896 uprisings for the freedom of Crete from the Ottoman Empire. Venizelos became the islands first independent prime minister in 1905 and the prime minister of Greece in 1910.

Eleftherios Venizelos has played a very important role in the history of Greece until 1930. Venizelos led the campaign for union of Crete with Greece (1913) and he supported the Balkan League against Turkey and Bulgaria. During the First World War Venizelos supported Britain, France and Russia against the Central Powers. He wanted Greece to give military aid to the Allies during the Dardanelles campaign, and when King Constantine I refused to agree, he resigned from office.

Venizelos was re-elected in March 1915. After his invitation to the Allied forces to Salonika he was dismissed by the king and he returned to Crete where he formed a provisional revolutionary government. In June 1917, King Constantine I was deposed and Venizelos regained power to lead the Greek war until the Armistice in November 1918. At the Versailles Peace Conference, Venizelos won substantial territorial gains from Bulgaria and Turkey.

Despite his achievements Venizelos was defeated in the 1920 General Election and the new government invited King Constantine I back to power. Venizelos became prime minister again in 1924, 1928-32 and 1933. In 1935 Venizelos came out of retirement to support another republican coup d'etat in Greece. When this failed Eleftherios Venizelos was forced to flee to France where he died in 1936.

Eleftherios Venizelos is buried in the **Tombs of Venizelos Family** in the village Akrotiri, next to Chania. His house, lying in the part of the city named **Halepa**, is planned to be converted to museum.

2 Mikis Theodorakis (1925 – today)

Theodorakis is an artist of international fame. He has composed more than 1000 songs, 5 symphonies, the ballets: "Greek Carnival", "Elektra", "Zorba", oratorios like: "The March of the Spirit" and "Canto General" four operas: "Kostas Karyotakis", "Medea", "Elektra" and now "Antigone", but also the Olympic anthem "Canto

Olympico", and the film scores for "Phaedra", "Z", "Elektra", "Zorba the Greek"; "Serpico", "Iphigenia".

Mikis Theodorakis was born in the island Chios (29 July 1925) but he is of Cretan descent. From 1954 to 1960 he has been working in Paris and London as a symphonic music, ballet and film composer. From 1960 he supports the union of poetry and music in Greece, politically he resists to the military dictatorship (1967-74) and becomes member of the Greek Parliament several times.

3. Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957)

He was one of the most important Greek writers, poets and philosophers. "I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free."

Nikos Kazantzakis was born in Heraklion and he was one of the most important Greek writers, poets and philosophers of the 20th century. He is famous for his novel Alexis Zorbas, which is translated in English and has become a movie. His humanist views led the Orthodox Church to excommunicate him. "I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free." are some of his heretic concepts.

Nikos Kazantzakis graduated from the Athens Law School and continued his studies in Paris (1907-1909). He fought in the Balkan Wars as a volunteer in the Greek Army. After the Wars he travelled to many European and Asian countries, publishing travelogues from his trips. He was much more of a philosopher than a writer and he was deeply influenced by Nietzsche and Bergson as well as the philosophies of Christianity, Marxism and Buddhism.

In 1927 he published the book of philosophy "Askitiki". In 1938, after constantly revising it for 13 years (1925-1938), he publishes his epic poem Odyssey: A modern sequel, continuing Ulysses's story from the point where Homer leaves off. During the last years of his life Nikos Kazantzakis turns to pezo-graphy, where he becomes famous. He published Zorba the Greek, The Last Temptation of Christ, Freedom and Death, The Greek Passion, and his autobiography Report to Greco. In 28th of June 1956, in Vienna, he was awarded the International Peace Award.

There is a room devoted to Nikos Kazantzakis in the Historical Museum of Crete. A complete picture of Nikos Kazantzakis life and work can also be acquired by a visit to the **Nikos Kazantzakis Museum** at the village Myrtia, next to his father's house.

4. Domenico Theotokopoulos (El Greco, 1541-1614), a great painter, sculptor and architect

El Greco is Cretan-born painter, sculptor, and architect who settled in Spain and is regarded as the first great genius of the Spanish School. He was one of the greatest Mannerist.

El Greco studied the icon painters of the Cretan school and he traveled between Venice (he studied under Titian), Rome (influenced by Michelangelo), and Spain (settling in Toledo).

The Christian doctrines of Spain made a crucial impact on his approach to painting, and his art represents a blend of passion and restraint, religious fervour and Neo-Platonism, influenced by the mysticism of the Counter-Reformation.

El Greco's only painting in Crete is exhibited in the **Historical Museum in Knossos**.

5. King Mino(a)s

The legendary Minos is probably a composite of many Minoan Kings whose fame lasted for centuries after their death. According to Greek Mythology, Minos was the first King in world, who made wise legislations and army nave, with which Minos won the barbarians in Aegean Sea and allowed the Cretans to make the Minoan Civilization. He is regarded as the son of Zeus, the king of the gods, and Europa, a personification of the continent of Europe.

Minos obtained the Cretan throne by the help of the Greek god Poseidon and he gained control over the Aegean islands. He married Pasiphae, the daughter of the Sun who bore him Androgeos, Ariadne, and Phaedra, and who was also the mother of the Minotaur. Minos successfully warred against Athens and Megara to revenge the death of his son Androgeos, who was killed by them. After that Minos became the tyrannical exactor of the tribute of children to feed the Minotaur until Theseus managed to kill him. Minos was killed in Sicily by the daughters of King Cocalus, who poured boiling water over him as he was taking a bath. He is said to have become a judge in Hades after his death.

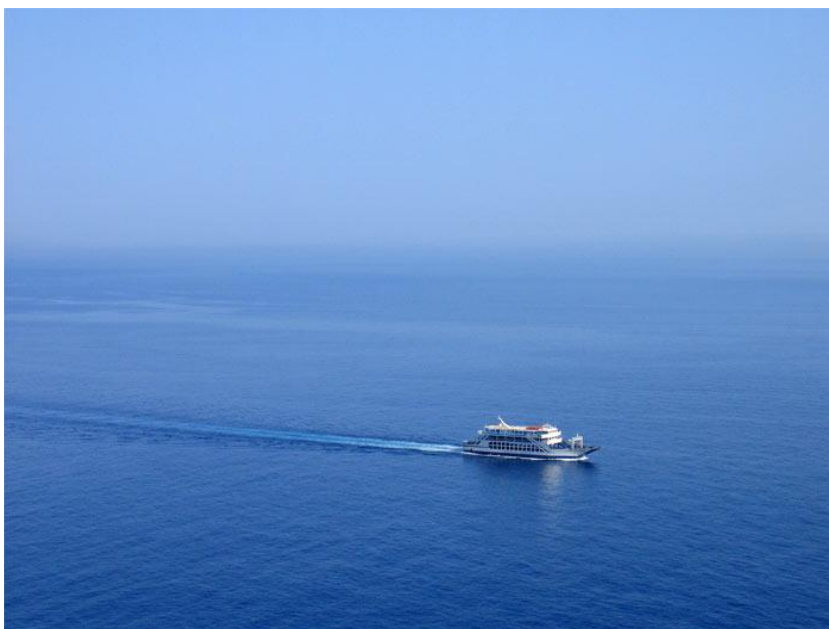
Knossos Palace is the legendary site of Theseus fighting the Minotaur, Ariadne and her ball of string, Daedalus the architect and doomed Icarus of the wax wings.

5. HOW TO COME IN CRETE

The visitors of Crete can arrive in the island either by boat (through Piraeus in Athens) or by aeroplane in one of the two airports, in Chania (CHQ) at the west or in Heraklion (HER) at the east. The two airports are about 140 km each one from the other while a medium quality national road joins the west with the east Crete.

During the summer there are provided charters from most European countries to both airports (Easyjet, Ryanair, Norwegian, KLM come in Crete). Please note that Heraklion airport is much bigger than Chania airport, and it offers about three times the flights of Chania airport.

The visitors can also fly to Athens and then take a boat from Piraeus to Chania



or Heraklion (there is boat connection to every city two/three times per day, one at 5 hours through daily trip, and another slower at 9 hours through night trip). The most important Ship companies are Minoan Lines, Anek Lines, and Blue Star

Ferries. Heraklion ship port is also bigger than the port in Chania area.

Please note that there are almost daily ships from **Heraklion to Santorini, Ios, Paros, Mykonos**; with Catamaran or with Sea Jets-Megajet (750 passengers and 100 cars capacity).

There is also another ship per week connecting **Kalamata** or **Githeio** at the south of Peloponnesus with Kasteli or Rethymno.

6. GENERAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

We strongly recommend our guests to have their own private travel (health) insurance (by their country) since the health system in Greece is very complicated and it would cost a lot for the guest to pay a private doctor. There are public Hospitals available in every area but it takes much longer to serve people and the doctors usually do not have time to work on minor injuries. The travel insurance which we recommend should also cover the loss or theft of belongings and the expenses incurred due to delayed or cancelled flights. In Greece there is Tourist Police which is specialised in the protection of the millions of tourists that visit the island every year and which you should call in case of a problem.

An easy way for the visitors to earn money is to go for shopping in large supermarkets (**INKA, CARREFOUR MARINOPOULOS, CHALKIADAKIS, LIDDLE**) since they are usually much cheaper than the mini markets. Unfortunately, in the waterfront villages there are very few of them and they are usually located in the perimeter of the villages. To buy clothes there are many shops located in the centres of the cities and the villages which can serve the tourists. However it may take some time to search for reasonable prices. Regarding the food, in Crete the visitors can find excellent traditional cuisine and many international/thematic restaurants. If they want to eat cheaply they can order just a Greek salad with two beers or buy souvlaki (or a proportion of Giros). The prices are always shown outside the restaurants so the tourists can check before eating.

In the end the guests of Crete should know that the Cretans are usually very friendly with the tourists and willing to help. In most cases the locals can communicate well in the English language making the life of tourists easier.

7. HEALTH AND SECURITY TIPS

Travel Insurance

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

Sunburn, Heatstroke

Cretan sun has quite much burning power, which you should never underestimate. It can be punishing as early as April. You should use a high-factor sunscreen or sunblock, especially on boat trips. Do not attempt strenuous hiking or mountain riding in July or August, drink plenty of water and wear a hat. Symptoms can be aggravated by alcohol - drink an extra half litre of water for each unit of alcohol you consume.

Insects and Pests

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

Breakdowns and Accidents

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

Doctors

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

Dentists

Dentists are proficient and can be found in all main towns. You must pay for your treatment in cash.

Hospitals

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

Pharmacies

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

Crime

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

8. EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

Police: 100

First Aid: 166

Drug Enforcement Agency: 109

Fire Brigade: 199

Emergencies Hospitals, Pharmacies: 1434

Forest agency: 191

Tourist police: 171

9. EMBASSIES IN ATHENS

Australia: 2108704000

Austria: 2107257270

Belgium: 2103617886-7, 2103600314-5

Canada: 2107273400

China: 2106723282

Cyprus: 2107237883, 2107239377

Denmark: 2107256440

Finland: 2107255860

France: 2103391000

Germany: 2107285111

Great Britain: 2107272600

Israel: 2106705500

Italy: 2103617260-3

Norway: 2107246173

Spain: 2109213123, 2109213237-8

Sweden: 2107266100

Switzerland: 2107230364/5/6, 2107299471/2/4

USA: 2107212951, 2107294301

10. CHANIA

Chania is regarded as a very picturesque small city of Greece, with a lot of life during the summer months, friendly people, blue sea and sky, and sandy beaches. The famous **Venetian old town** with its small streets and the Venetian buildings, the



picturesque Venetian harbour with the Lighthouse and the Firkas castle create a majestic, romantic atmosphere which can be rarely found in Europe.

Chania is an ideal destination to combine the romantic atmosphere

of the Venetian Town with the touristic facilities that have been created during the last years; the well-organised sandy beaches west and east of the city, the numerous cafes,



restaurants and tavernas along the old harbour and the seaside villages, the endless waterfront to the west and the east of the city, the beach-bars on the sandy beaches, the seaside clubs and bars outside the city.

In the outskirts of the town, on the way to the airport there is the **Halepa** district. Halepa is a historical suburb of Crete where many diplomatic activities have taken place. The house of Eleftherios Venizelos, one of the greatest politicians in Greece, is located here.

A little further from Halepa there is the hill of Profitis Ilias with the **Tombs of Venizelos** family. The small park offers gorgeous views on the Chania city, especially during the sunset. There are two lovely cafes next to the Tombs, Koukouvagia and Ostria, which you could visit for a while.

If you are a fan of nature then the passing of the longest gorge of Europe is a must. **Samaria Gorge** is located about 50 km from Chania and it leads to a lovely small village with crystal waters, Agia Roumeli. In case you also like swimming in lakes or enjoy the lakes then the **lake of Kournas** worth seeing. It is located about 40 km east of Chania with many lovely tavernas with traditional food next to it.

Chania is also an ideal location to explore the rest of Crete since the distances are not really a big deal; you can find some of the most unique sights and natural beaches of Crete in less than 60 minutes distance in south and west Crete, the most famous archaeological sites of **Knossos** and **Phaestos** dating thousands of years ago in the nearby districts of Heraklion and Rethymno, the remaining of the Turkish and the Venetian castles dispersed in many remote villages of the island, the existing Venetian Monasteries and Churches.

Chania Old Town

Chania Old Town is regarded as one of the nicest old towns of Greece and it is the most wonderful part of the city. The "Old Town" consists of the old Venetian harbour and the small Venetian blocks located behind the harbour; it is characterized by narrow and picturesque alleys - similar to an enchanting labyrinth - full of life, and the plentiful remaining Venetian and Turkish buildings. The Lighthouse, the Fortress of Firka, the Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan, the Great Arsenali and the Neoria have become



landmarks of the city (see our photo album).

Most of the buildings are rejuvenated and they compose a puzzle of contemporary, Venetian and Turkish architecture; they are also a 'living' exhibition of the

city's history. Today they work as shops, tavernas, cafes and touristic accommodations.

The most famous part of the Old Town is the lively round waterfront along the Venetian harbour, which is full of small hotels, cafes, restaurants, tavernas and bars. The Lighthouse at the end of the harbour is a landmark of Chania.

Inside the "Old town" there are various districts. The Daliani district was a place where Turks used to live and the Dominican church of Saint Nicolas still remains. The Kasteli district used to be a noble district, where many mansions were located in the past. At the end of its central road, the "Sintrivani" square is located, where the gentlemen were gathered for coffee, walking or political conversation. Today this area is regarded as the entrance to the old town and it is full of cafes, restaurants and small bars. In that district it is also located the mosque of Hasan pasha. The "Akti Kountourioti" is a place with local shops, where many young and older people gathered for entertainment in the bars and restaurants nearby. There is also the Topana district which is named that way because of the cannons (topia) that the Turks had placed there.

If you want to eat in the Chania Old Town you should try traditional food in the **Tamam** (renovated Turkish Hamam which offers excellent east food), the **Ela** or **Semiramis** (traditional food), the **Pigadi tou Tourkou** (former 19th century steam bath), or in **Kariatides** (elegant restaurant with excellent Italian cuisine). You can also have coffee or light food in the **Palace** (previous Venetian Mansion House on the waterfront), light food in **Xalkina** (on the waterfront) and **Bar-raki** (near the waterfront, in Venetian ruins). For an early drink the **Sinagogue** (renovated Venetian building) is a peaceful-lounge bar in the Venetian town. For late drinks (after 00:00) please try the clubs **Villa Mercedes** (lounge restaurant as well) and **Savvy** (beach restaurant as well) in the village of Agia Marina (west of Chania), and after 03:00 you can try **Mylos** in Plataniias (west of Chania). Of course, there are many more bars and cafes which you can try almost in every village!

During tKoum Kapi area is also in a short walking distance (less than 10 minutes) from the Chania Old Town so you can go there for a coffee, drink or food. In the Koum Kapi district there are numerous cafes, restaurants and bars in the waterfront, along the main pedestrian street.

Unique Sandy Beaches in Chania Area

Elafonisi is located at a distance of about 80 km from the city of Chania. Elafonisi is called an excellent sandy beach with blue and green sea and colourful sandy



beach. There is a small islet in front of the beach with the same name.

It is a peaceful place full of colours and light. You could go there on foot, as the distance from the land is less than 100 m. The white sand,

the sandy hills and the various colors will compensate for your labour. There is also a small cafe on the beach with fast food and soft drinks.

Balos beach is located west of Chania (about 50 km far) and north-west of the village of Kastelli, on the wild and remote Gramvoussa peninsula. It is formed by steep rocks and it is covered with thyme, origanum bushes and wild flowers. On the north-west side of the peninsula, opposite to the island of Gramvoussa and the Gramvoussa



castle, there is the wonderful beach of Balos. The Balos beach is covered with fine white sand; the same white sand covers the bottom of the sea and grants to the sea an emerald colour.

You can get a

boat from the Kastelli harbour at about 10 am to visit the Balos beach; otherwise you have to go on foot. The road to the beach stops about 2 km before it and the visitor has to follow a paved road with gorgeous views to reach it. It takes about half an hour and the climbing in the end is much more difficult.

Falassarna is regarded as one of the nicest sandy beaches in Crete and one of the ten best beaches in Greece; it is located 16 km west of Kastelli and about 50 km west of Chania. The road leading to Falassarna village is quite good and during the first 35 km it is part of the National road of Crete.

The Falassarna beach is a long, big, sandy beach with amazing views during the



sunset. The sea is always very clear and it tempts you go for swimming. There is plenty of space to play water-sports or beach tennis; there is also a volley field on the beach.

You can visit Falassarna beach for one day as an

excursion or stay in the nearby accommodation for longer, since the village is an ideal location to relax, unwind and refill your batteries. There are numerous traditional taverns in the village and the nearby area (for example in Kaliviani there are two excellent tavernas).

The ruins of the ancient harbour-city of Falassarna can be explored during an excursion on the north of the beach. The excavations have exposed some of the walls and buildings of the city.

Paleochora is the southernmost seaside town in the Prefecture of Chania, and it is located 76 km far from Chania, with about 1,500 people. It has been built on the top of a small peninsula, below the ruins of the Venetian Castle, and it is washed by the waves on three sides. Some decades before Paleochora was a hippies destination; nowadays it is a preferable quiet touristic village which is visited by many locals every weekend.



There are two beautiful and picturesque bays with fantastic beaches in the village. The Eastern sandy beach is called "Halikia", it is 2 km long and quite crowded and it is an excellent place for windsurfing. The

beach to the West is called "Pahia Ammos" and it is a pebble beach. When the wind blows the pebble beach is much more protected. Both beaches have been awarded with a Blue Flag. There are also numerous beaches (usually pebble) near the village of Paleochora with crystal waters.

Please note that Sougia, Sfakia, and Loutro are also some very well-known unique destinations ideal for swimming and unwind holidays. All of them are located to the south of Chania area.

Samaria Gorge

The Gorge of Samaria is situated in the National park of Samaria 43 km from the city of Chania in the White Mountains in West Crete. It is the second most popular



tourist attraction in Crete (after the Minoan palace of Knossos) and by far the most popular walk. It is estimated that more than a quarter million people walk through the Gorge every year from the beginning of May to the end of

October. The Samaria Gorge is an area of stunning natural beauty, passing through forests of ancient cypresses and pines.

According to the Greek mythology, one of the Titans cut the land with his knife to create the Gorge, while Zeus placed his throne on the top of the mountain Gygilos and raced his chariot on the nearby mountain plain when he got bored with the disputes and intrigues in Olympus. The Gorge of Samaria is 16 km long (the longest Gorge in Europe), starting at an altitude of 1250 m (at Xyloskalo at the end of Omalos village) and taking you all the way down to the shores of the Libyan sea in Agia Roumeli through the narrow Sidesportes or "Iron Gates" (rocky walls that rise up to 500 metres with only 3 meters wide). Next to the entrance of the Gorge, "Xyloskalo", there is a tourist pavilion with a view of the majestic mountain of Gigolos (alt. 2,083 m.).

The walk through the Gorge from "Xyloskalo" down to Agia Roumeli (17 km trek) will take you anything from 3 to 5 hours of walking time (excluding the breaks) if you are a fit walker; otherwise it can take up to 7-8 hours.

If you are lucky enough you can see or even meet the famous Kri-Kri (*Capra aegagrus cretica*) or some of the rarest birds of Europe; the lammergeier, the golden eagle, the *Hieraetus* (Bonelli's eagle) and the griffon Vulture.

A few hundred meters far from Xyloskalo there is the Church of Agios Nikolaos, a small stone church, hidden among huge cypress trees. It is believed that the Sanctuary and Oracle of Apollo are hidden under the Church. Moreover, on the

7th km of the walk down to Agia Roumeli the derelict village of Samaria is located. It was abandoned in 1962 when the area was designated a National Park. Next to the village there is the Church that was dedicated to Saint Maria of Egypt and from which the Gorge and the settlement were named after.

The Samaria National Park is open from the beginning of May to the end of October from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day. From 3 p.m. to the sunset visitors are allowed only to the first two kilometres of the path from both entrances (Xyloskalo and Agia Roumeli). There are public means of transport (buses-KTEL next to the famous square '1866') going to Xyloskalo during the morning.

In Agia Roumeli you can get one ferryboat returning to Hora Sfakion and then take an evening bus returning to Chania. From Agia Roumeli you can also get a ferryboat going to Sougia or Paleochora but there will be no bus returning to Chania the same day. If you are not alone and you do not like the idea of a bus you can share a taxi to Omalos; it costs about 40 Euros.

Useful Tips

Wear strong shoes

Use a back sack to carry a bottle of water and fruits

Have some light food (sandwich) with you

Take your time to admire and 'feel' the Samaria Gorge

11. RETHYMNO

Rethymno is a modern, seaside, small city which is built between Chania and Heraklion at the north of Crete. It is situated between the prefectures of Chania and Heraklion, abutting the Cretan Sea at the north and the Libyan Sea at the south. The area of Rethymno extends from the mountains of Lefka Ori to the mountain of Psiloritis with a population of 70.095 people. Rethymno hosts about 10.000 students, creating a very young and friendly atmosphere, famous for its nightlife and the cosy cafes and bars.



The town of Rethymno represents a place of contrasts, boasting a long and remarkable history as well as untouched places of natural beauty and living traditions. This small Mediterranean town

will enchant you with its centre dating from the period of the Renaissance, its fortress and museums as well as its beaches, not to mention a visit to the wider area of the Prefecture. Where to begin is a difficult decision to make: In the picturesque villages, the areas of natural beauty, the caves, the beaches or the mountains and the gorges? The inhabitants will certainly become your friends. They will offer you a glass of "tsikoudia" and invite you to their home.

Rethymno is a very picturesque small town (it looks like the Chania city) with fine waterfront (lovely cafes, tavernas and shops are located here), a long, sandy beach in front of the town and a lovely old Venetian town, similar to the Chania old town; it is characterised by picturesque streets with small cafes, shops and traditional tavernas, and many renovated Venetian buildings; the Venetian fortress (**Fortezza**) above the town and the fine Lighthouse are the landmarks of Rethymno. Like the rest of Crete in Rethymno you can find blue and clear sky and sea, light sun and intense nightlife; almost whatever you can dream of.

While staying in Rethymno you will try the romantic atmosphere of the old



town, you can relax in the excellent sandy beaches in the seaside villages east and west of the city (you can also try the sandy beach in the town), you can visit the fine remote sandy beaches to the south of the prefecture, the

famous archaeological sites of Phaistos and Gortys, and the historical monasteries of **Arkadi** and **Preveli**. During the night you can either have fun in the town of Rethymno or visit the nearby waterfront villages (**Platanes, Sfakaki**) to the east of the town.

The guests of Rethymno town can try the light food traditional taverns in the narrow streets of the old town, where they can enjoy local food and hear to traditional music. Moreover, there are a few excellent cafes in the waterfront of Rethymno which all the guests can visit (Living Room next to the main square, Nouvelle opposite the Lighthouse, Häagen-Dazs on the waterfront), and a few bars which worth visiting (Ice, Fortezza).

Please note that there are more lovely tavernas in the nearby villages (Maroulas, Panormo and Bali to the west, Episkopi to the east).

Rethymno Old Town

Rethymno old Town is characterized by its picturesque streets with small shops, pensions, restaurants, a few lovely small squares, and the waterfront area; there is the small Venetia harbour with the **Lighthouse** and many lovely tavernas built on the edge



of the sea and the rest extended gulf with the long, sandy beach of Rethymno and the rest waterfront shops, restaurants and blocks of houses.

The old Town is a mix of Venetian, Turkish and modern architecture that

inspires and relaxes the visitor; it also reminds of the great history of Crete. The

Venetian Fortress with the Nerandzes mosque above the town dominates the horizon



and it is an excellent place to have some panoramic snaps of the town. The Venetian Lighthouse is another great landmark of the harbour and the town (like the Lighthouse in Chania).

Moreover, in the picturesque,

medieval streets of the Venetian old Town the visitor can find the **Rimondi Fountain** (built in 1926), the **Venetian Loggia** (today here are sold reproductions of Classical works of art), the **Venetian Gate** (Porta Guora) leading from the old Town to the modern city, and the public gardens. The colourful, renovated Venetian buildings and

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the public spaces create a romantic atmosphere, a mixture of Venetian, Turkish and Modern Greek architecture.

Rethymno Unique Beaches

Preveli Beach



Preveli sandy beach and gorge are an excellent sightseeing to visit while staying in Rethymno. You can go to Preveli either by car (you should leave it about 20 minute's walk down to a steep hill) or by ferry.

The main access to Preveli from Rethymno is through a 2km long steep gorge, the Kourtaliotis gorge. The name 'Kourtaliotis' is said to come from the clinking of stones heard rattling when the north wind blows through this narrow passage.

The Kourtaliotis river runs through the gorge, into which other streams of the area flow to form the Great River. The main springs of the river are virtually in the center of the gorge, near the church of the local saint, St. Nicolaos the Kourtaliotis. The river flows into the Libyan Sea, passing through fertile farming sites, at a place called Limni, which is very well-known for its beauty.

The whole area is quite remarkable for its fertility and the richness of the flora and fauna. The diverse vegetation, including self-planted palm trees, offers an exotic impression to the beautiful landscape.

Agios Pavlos Beach

The lovely sandy beach of **Agios Pavlos** is located 58 km far from Rethymno and 13 km from the main road leading to Agia Galini. Facilities for swimming, sunbathing, and water sports are offered in a quite long beach in a small gulf with chrystal waters.

There are two more "hidden" sandy beaches 150m from the main beach which worth visiting. A few cafes and tavernas are offered in the centre of the village. Agios Pavlos is an ideal remote place to relax for a few days or to visit for a while.



To go to Agios Pavlos you should follow the road to Agia Galini and after 46 km turn right at the crossroads of the village of Kria Vrissi. Continue until you arrive at the seaside. Bathing in one of the isolated

inlets, which have formed between the rocks, and seeing the sand dunes will be an unforgettable experience.

Skinaria Beach



Skinaria is an excellent sandy beach accessed from Lefkogeia village (3 km far) on the road from Plakias to Preveli which is located 38 km from Rethymno. The beach is not usually crowded. Skinaria beach is developed

during the last years and it offers a taverna next to the beach, and facilities for swimming, sunbathing and sea sports.

Access from Rethymno is possible by public bus up to Lefkogeia (32 km far from Rethymno at the South) and then on foot, but the best way to reach the beach is by rented or private car and bikes.

Ammoudi Beach



Ammoudi is a popular sandy beach which is located 6 km east of Plakias and 38 km from Rethymno. Ammoudi is a well organised beach, offering accommodation facilities in hotels and rooms to let, as

well as taverns for food and drink. Swimming, sunbathing (sunloungers, umbrellas) and sea sports are available in the beach.

Next to Ammoudi there is the “mikro – little” Ammoudi beach, which is another smaller sandy beach, preferred by nudists.

12. HERAKLION

Heraklion is the capital of Crete, in the centre of the northern coast of Crete. It is the birthplace of the first European civilization and during Minoan Period at about 3.000 b. c. here was located the capital of Knossos.

Heraklion has a population of about 150,000 and is the fifth largest city in Greece. During the last years there have been major city transformations to the waterfront and to the old town which have improved the image of the city; nowadays there are many modern cafes, small bas, and shopping facilities in the waterfront area.

Heraklion in ancient times served as a port of Knossos but it is only in the 9th century AD that it appears as a town founded by the Saracens. Heraklion became the slave trade centre in the Mediterranean, to be soon after taken over by the Venetians who built immense fortification walls called it **Kandax** which was later paraphrased to become **Candia**.

During the four centuries of the Venetian occupation of Crete, many buildings were erected that are excellent examples of Venetian Architecture of that time, and many of them exist today. The **Basilica di San Marco** and the **Loggia** are two such specimens, while the **Morozini fountain** with its four lions has even given its name in the central spot of the town.

Heraklion is very privileged today, to have in its suburb list, famous names like **Knossos**, and the most prominent city of the Minoan era. Linked directly with Knossos, is the Iraklion Archaeological Museum housing most findings not only from Knossos but other Minoan Palaces like Phaestos in the south, **Malia** on the east and **Zakros** at the extreme east of Crete.

In Heraklion are located the famous **Archaeological Museum**, the Historical Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Museum of Battle of Crete.

Here can be also found the University of Crete, Faculty of Medicine (8.000 students), Technological Institution (6.500 students), the Foundation of Research and Technology (FORTH), Technological Park (STEPc).

Crete Golf Club (+30 2897026000) is the only 18-Hole Course on the island of Crete! The Crete Golf Club is located approximately 24 km east of the International Airport of Heraklion.

The **Aquarium of Crete** (+30 2810337788) is located 14 km east of Heraklion airport. It is open from 09:30 to 21:00 from May to September and from 09:30 to 17:00

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during the rest months. The aquarium building lies about 100 meters from a long sandy bathing beach.

Knossos

Knossos is the most famous of the palaces of the Minoan civilization. It was destroyed possibly by a volcanic eruption about 1450 BC. The ancient Knossos was the hub of the Minoan Civilization which imposed the Aegean 4000 years ago. According to mythology, the palace was the seat of the king Minos. It is also connected with intriguing legends, such as the myth of the Minotaur in the Labyrinth under the Palace, and the story of **Daedalos** and **Ikaros**. Minos Kalokerinos did the first excavations of the site in 1878. However, Sir Arthur Evans was the archaeologist who did the complete excavations of the site (1900-1913 and 1922-1930).

The old (first) palace was built around 2000 B.C. but it was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1700 B.C. The new (second) palace was built immediately on the ruins of the old one and it was more complex in plan, like a labyrinth. In the middle of the 15th century B.C. when the Achaeans from the Greek Mainland conquered Crete it was partially destroyed. The palace was finally destroyed again by fire (Santorini Volcano) in the mid-14th century B.C. Sir Arthur Evans managed to extensively reconstruct the Palace of Knossos.

The Palace of Knossos is the largest and the most spectacular of all the Minoan palatial centres. The Palace spread over 20,000 square meters (2 hectares) of land with heights reaching four stories. It was constructed in a labyrinth-like pattern and it provided housing for about 100,000 people. Colourful friezes and frescoes, figures and paintings on plaster fill the walls of the palace and exhibit life from this era. There are varying pictures from animals and people to gods and various ceremonies, which depict an advanced and sophisticated society. Further examination of the Palace's interior decoration reveals that war was not a common theme and women were depicted almost as frequently as men.

The variety of building materials used and the marble revetment show an advanced level of technology. This is also demonstrated by some architectural and structural features, such as the light-wells and the complex drainage and water-supply systems.

The palace is set around a large Central Court, which was used for public meetings. A second courtyard, the West Court, was used both as the official approach to the palace and a ceremonial area. In the west wing there are the official rooms for administrative and religious activities; the Tripartite Shrine, the Sacred Repositories and the Pillar Crypts; the Throne Room is outstanding among them. The most important

areas in the south wing are the South Propylon, the Corridor of the Procession and the South Entrance, with the fresco of the Prince of the Lilies. The east wing contained the residential quarters and large reception rooms, the most important being the Hall of the Double Axes and the Queen's Hall. These rooms are approached by the imposing Grand Staircase. From the North Entrance, a road led to the harbour of Knossos. The North Entrance is flanked by elevated stoas, the west one being decorated with the Bull Hunt fresco. The stone-paved Royal Road led from the Small Palace and the city to the North-west corner of the palace, where there was an open-air theatrical area.

Around the palace the Minoan settlement extended with the cemeteries on the hills. Some more important buildings are the followings; the South House, the House of the Chancel Screen, the Small Palace, the Caravanserai, the Royal Villa and the Temple-Tomb. The Villa Dionysos with its floor mosaics (2nd AD) is an important building of the Roman period. All the impressive finds of the palace (pottery, vessels, figurines, the archive of Linear B tablets, and the original wall-paintings) are housed in the Herakleion Museum.

Useful Tips

It is better to visit Knossos in spring or autumn, since the cooler weather will make it easier to explore the site. However, if you visit Crete in the peak of summer try to be in the site in the first morning hours.

There are a few tavernas and snack bars near the entrance on the road to Heraklion.

13. AGIOS NIKOLAOS

Agios Nikolaos is a beautiful, picturesque town full of traditional charm that lies on the north coast of Crete, 65 km east of Heraklion and 10 km south of Elounda. The resort overlooks the sheltered blue waters of Mirabello Bay and is backed by mountains leading to Lasithi Plateau.



It is a quiet seaside resort that is enjoyed by families with children and couples alike, crammed full of atmospheric cafés, charming little shops and enticing eateries around a small lake.

Founded as the ancient port of Lato, it lay abandoned for centuries and was only resettled as a fishing village in 1870. Today it is one of Crete largest holiday resorts. The town centres around **Lake Voulismeni**, a small circular harbour-lake, which according to local myth is bottomless, edged with open-air cafes, bars, shops and tavernas and a yachting marina where you can really unwind in laid-back style here. Shopaholics will love popping in and out of the chic boutiques and jewellery shops. There are numerous beaches close by, many of which have been awarded the European Blue Flag for cleanliness.

From the town harbour, daily excursion boats depart for the extraordinary island of **Spinalonga**, opposite **Elounda**, which was fortified by the Venetians in the 17th century to protect the Cretan coast against the Turks, then used as leper colony from 1913 to 1957.

Elounda

Elounda, located in east Crete, 10 km north of Agios Nikolaos and 65 km from Heraklion is a renowned tourism resort, famous for its beautiful scenery and luxury hotels. The once picturesque fishing village in Mirabello Bay faces the dramatic Spinalonga Peninsula.



Having a protected coastline, shaded beaches, crystal clear seas, and a stylish environment, Elounda is ideal for people who want a seaside holiday in a place which is neither too busy nor too

isolated.

Family-friendly hotels and tavernas, romantic venues ideal for couples, ample shops for leisurely browsing, and a good range of bars and eateries make Elounda a great all-rounder. Elounda's main square is the hub of resort life, looking out onto the stylish harbour, edged with lively bars and cafés which becomes a hive of activity after dark. Just beyond the square there's a sandy beach that's purpose built for sunbathing, and along the rocky shoreline are several pebble coves – perfect for crystal clear snorkelling. There are watersports centres offered at several hotels and everything is surrounded by stunning scenery.

Also famous is the small island of Spinalonga in the entrance of Elounda harbour. A Venetian fortress built in 1579 now uninhabited was once used as a leper colony. There is a boat connection to Spinalonga about every half an hour.

Sitia

Sitia is the main port and town of the eastern extremity of Crete. It is a lively, little town and tourism is not a major activity, even though it has a lovely long sandy beach that is rarely crowded and offers a great variety of watersports.

Sitia is a very pretty working town and fishing harbour with a busy atmosphere, but it also manages to stay laid back and keeps its charm. Its boast a very pleasant waterfront lined with a good choice of cafes and tavernas serving traditional food and fresh seafood.



You will find most things in Sitia, local folklore, museums, with a variety of shops and some small bars and discos which are not full of tourists and are often frequented by locals. The surrounding countryside is

magnificent and home to various monasteries (notably **Toplou**), archaeological sites, palm-forested beaches (the famous sandy beach of **Vai**), sparkling bays and fascinating treks all enjoying the subtropical climate.

14. SANTORINI

Santorini, also known as Thira or Fira, is a volcanic island in the southern Aegean Sea, about 200 km southeast from mainland of Greece, 2 hours by ship from Heraklion harbour. Please note that during summer there can be also a few flights organises from Heraklion to Santorini with a small airplane.

Santorini is the largest island of a small, circular archipelago which bears the same name. Santorini is famous for its sandy beaches, the crystal waters and the cosmopolitan atmosphere it offers. Santorini is celebrated for its mystical aura, the unique architecture, splendid beaches, and lovely views of the volcano, the Aegean Sea and the golden sunset.

Santorini offers a few unique beaches with volcanic sand, such as the Red "Κόκκινη" and White "Άσπρη" beaches near the village of Akrotiri, on the southern coast of the island, and the grey and black beaches in Kamari, Perissa, Perivolos, and Monolithos, on the eastern coast of the island. There are also more beautiful beaches along the northern shores, such as Ammoudi, Armeni, Baxedes, Paradissos, Koloubos and Vourvoulou.

Kamari Beach : The most popular beach of Santorini, gathering the majority of visitors. A great number of hotels, inns, shops and people, composing a pure setting of vacations. Awarded with the E.U. blue flag beach.

Red Beach : The name of the beach reveals its colour. The volcano here selected its own favorite colour. Dark red stone becoming red sand down deep at the seabottom. Even though access is difficult – you have to walk for quite long –, it is really worth living the experience!

White Beach : Right next to the Red Beach, stretches out the White Beach, simply for a change in color! Small, with clear transparent waters, white pebbles, calmness and tranquillity! It is worth exploring the sea bottom with your mask and snorkel! For those who want to see and feel the difference!

SANTORINI SIGHTSEEINGS

All guests of Santorini should visit the world-famous sunset of **Oia** – people from everywhere in the world come to live this unique experience!

The most famous sites in Santorini are the Akrotiri settlement and Ancient Thira. Akrotiri dates back to Prehistoric Times and is considered to be linked to the

Lost Continent of Atlantis. At this site, you have the opportunity to admire a well-preserved settlement, including houses, stores, staircases, roads and an ancient sewage system.

Ancient Thira, which is located on a hill above the villages of Kamari and Perissa, is a marvellous site, complete with ruins of sanctuaries, an agora, a theatre, a gymnasium, and a graveyard. You should visit the Museum of Pre-historic Thira in Fira. You will be impressed with the findings exhibited there.

You can also dedicate a day to take a boat trip to the volcanic isles of Thirassia, Palea Kammeni and Nea Kammeni, which are located in the Caldera area, opposite Santorini.

SANTORINI NIGHTLIFE

On Santorini Island, visitors will find a wide selection of entertainment venues, from quiet cafes and bars to stimulating clubs and from traditional tavernas to posh fusion restaurants.

One of the best features of the island is its cuisine. We recommend trying some of the traditional dishes, including fried white aubergines, tomato balls, courgette balls, sun-dried tomatoes and fava bean dip, and a bottle of famous Santorini wine.

15. MYKONOS

The famous island of Mykonos lies almost in the center of the Cyclades islands. It is a cosmopolitan island, famous the last decades from the international jet set visitors that spend here their holidays. Mykonos beaches are magnificent, the nightlife surprising and wild, however there is still plenty of traditional colours.

Mykonos is dominated by narrow, whitewashed streets with white cubicle houses, colored windows and small flowered courtyards, little churches and chapels, hidden minuscule piazzas and water wells.

The little Venice, the neighborhood of Kastro, the church of Panagia Paraportiani, the Archaeological Museum, the picturesque Windmills and shopping in Matogianni, the famous street with fashion boutiques, are some of the hot spots of Mykonos island.

Super Paradise beach, Psarou beach, Elia, Paranga beach, Platis Gilaos beach are some of the most well-known beaches of the island. In Mykonos the guests can start partying in the early afternoon and continue until next morning. It is said to be the Queen of Clubs, beaches and partying!

16. RHODES

Rhodes is the largest of Dodecanessa islands, and the capital of this group of islands with 100,000 people in total. Rhodes offers lovely sandy beaches, a beautiful old town, and many choices for elegant restaurants, cosy bars, nice local food and wine.

Rhodes is located in the eastern Aegean Sea which is famous for its medieval old town (one of Unesco monuments, the largest inhabited medieval town in Europe).

The castle of Knights, the palace of the Grand Master, the white town of Lindos (48 km south of the town of Rhodes) with the remains of the Acropole, and the Valley with the butterflies (27 km southwest) worth visiting. The guests can also visit the Aquarium in the centre of the town of Rhodes and the waterpark of Faliraki at about 10 km south of Rhodes town.

The beaches of Rhodes are usually sandy beaches and crystal clear waters, however sometimes the guests can also meet shingle or pebble beaches. A wide range of beaches, from isolated and totally unspoilt to fully organized beaches, can be found in Rhodes.

Kalitheia beach with old Italian baths is on the north east coast of the island and it is another famous spa resort. Kalitheia is located 5 km south of the town of Rhodes.

Faliraki beach with sand and crystal waters is also best known for its thriving nightlife and one of the most popular tourist destinations outside of the city. Many restaurants, cafes and tavernas are located within walking distance of the beach.

Lindos bay (about 48 km south of the town of Rhodes) offers many beaches on the east part of Rhodes, near the archeological site of Lindos Acropolis. Near Lindos, there is a small cove with a chapel dedicated to saint Paul, who landed Here in 43 AD to preach Christianity. The beach is mixed sandy-pebble and the guests can come here from Lindos on foot.

Tsambika is one of the most beautiful beaches of the island. The sandy beach is situated at the eastern coast of the island, 26 km from the town of Rhodes, close to the famous monastery of Panagia Tsambika. It is well organized with umbrellas, sun beds and sea sport facilities.

Next to the beach, climbing on the rocks, the old Monastery of Panaghia Tsambika which is dedicated to Virgin Mary, can be found. Virgin Mary is believed to protect the childless women and helps them to have a baby.

17. PAROS

Paros is one of the largest islands in the Cyclades Islands with Parikia being the capital of the island. Paros is located between the islands of Naxos and Sifnos and it offers 120 km of coastline. In Paros life passes in a careless and relaxing way.

The guests can visit the Byzantine church of Ekatontapyliani, the Archaeological Museum of Paros, the ancient Acropolis and much other sightseeing in the town of Parikia. The small traditional fishing village of Naoussa with lovely sunset views and the Lefkes village with the impressive architecture, the lovely houses and the pottery shops, also worth visiting.

If you would like to travel back to time, you can visit the villages of Lefkes, Marpissa, Alyki, Abelas, Drios, Piso Livadi and Pounda.

The airport of Paros is situated 9 km to the south west of Parikia, nearby the village of Alyki. There are regular flights to and from Athens. Further, local buses frequently link the "Paros Panteleio Airport" to Parikia (10 minutes) and Naoussa (25 minutes), which is the second important town of Paros, at 10 km northeast of Parikia.

Petaloudes (butterflies in Greek) is a valley at a distance of about 7 km from Parikia towards Pounta (South). Late Spring and during the first months of the summer numerous butterflies cover the whole valley.

UNIQUE BEACHES

Livadia is the most popular beach on the north side of Parikia, in Livadia. It is a long, sandy beach with clear waters, and a few shops along the beach

Krios beach is located 2 km far from the centre of Parikia with many restaurants and bars. Marcelo is another long, sandy beach at the extension of the beach of Krios with again many restaurants and bars.

Pounda is a beautiful, continuous, small beach in the homonymous resort, 8,5 km south of Paroikia. Pounda is exactly opposite of Antiparos islet and it is mostly preferred by the young with beach-bars and a few sea sports.

Monastiri is located in the west part of the bay of Naoussa and it is one of the most famous and overcrowded beaches of Paros. There are restaurants and bars that attract the youth.

Kolimbithres beach is a very beautiful, quiet, sandy beach in the west part of the bay of Naoussa. The rocks of granite because of the rot have been formed in different shapes and create natural hollows full of sea water that look like fonts and this picture is

really interesting.

Agioi Anargyri is a sandy beach a few hundred meters easter of Naoussa and 11 km northeast of the town of Paros (Parikia). It is a small, sandy beach with golden sand and crystal clean waters.

18. NAXOS

Naxos is the largest Cycladic island which perfectly combines the natural beauty with charming accommodations. The beautiful countryside and the spectacular views to the Aegean Sea create a very calming, relaxing atmosphere. Naxos town (also known as Chora), the island`s capital and port are characterized by the Cycladic architecture.

In the lovely island of Naxos the guests have the opportunity to explore a plethora of sightseeings; the "Portara" and the "Temple of Apollo", the "Ancient Mycenaean City", "The Castle", as well as "The Cave of Zas", "The Archaeological Museum" and the "Folk Museum" at Kastro.

A wide range of beaches, either with thin and white sand or with pebbles or rocks, can be found in Naxos island. The guests can choose among the most popular beaches including Abram beach, Ammitis beach and Apollonas beach (north side) or Ayiassos beach, Kalandos beach and Lionas bay (south side) or Agios Prokopios beach, Agia Anna beach, Plaka beach and Saint George beach (west side) or Moutsouna beach, Panormos beach and Psili Ammos beach (east side).

In the end, Naxos offers interesting dining and nightlife entertainment venues for all the tastes. On the beachfront and in the side streets of Naxos town there area countless bars, clubs, cafes or music halls, as well as traditional taverns, restaurants and ouzeries, where the guests can taste the delicious local delicacies and the sweet wines.

19. KOS

Kos Island is situated in the south-eastern area of the Aegean Sea. It is the third largest of the Greek islands and the second most popular and touristy island after Rhodes. It is located between Kalymnos and Nisyros and is mainly flat apart from two mountains: Dikaios (875m) and Sympantro.

Kos Island is the birthplace of Hippocrates, the father of medicine.

It has developed into one of the most important tourist attractions in Greece thanks to its excellent climate, natural beauty and rich history.

The various charms and beauties of the Greek Island are not visible at the first sight but, after a while, the picturesque villages and the fine beaches amaze all visitors. It is very well organized and has everything in terms of tourism infrastructure. Kos' many beauties include all-year-round sunshine, the clean sandy beaches, the picturesque countryside, the archaeological sites, and the cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Kos island is a small paradise full of unique beaches ranging from beaches with white sand or black small pebbles to well-organized beaches where many sea sports are provided and remote beaches ideal for those who prefer to escape from the intense rhythms of life and just relax. Some of them are Mastichari, Thermes, Kefalos, Kardamena, Lambi, Marmari, Tigaki, Paradise and Psalidi beach.

20. ATHENS

Athens is the famous capital of Hellas, where the roots of the west civilization can be found 2500 years before.

Today, it is a contemporary metropolis with about 5,000,000 people. The guests worth visiting the Acropolis and the brand new museum of **Acropolis**, the **Plaka**, **Thisio** and **Monastiraki** areas below Acropolis with so many lovely taverns and cafes, the cliff of **Lycabettus**, which the **goddess Athena** was said to have dropped from the heavens as a bulwark to defend the city, the Panathinaiko Stadio (**Panathenaic Stadium**) which held the first modern-day Olympic Games, the cosmopolitan seaside area of **Vouliagmenh**, the town of **Glyfada** with many luxurious shops, cafes and trendy clubs and cafes.