



GREECE CRETE

TRAVEL GUIDE TO **CRETE**











CRETE. Feel the authentic.

In his novel *Report to Greco*, acclaimed Cretan novelist Nikos Kazantzakis wrote: «Whoever sets foot on this isle can feel a mystic force, warm and kind, running through their veins, their souls growing greater.»

This is the very essence of Crete: mysterious, warm, kind, generous; ready to enchant each and every visitor. Crete is an unforgettable, seductive island that captivates the senses not only with its impressive, awe-inspiring landscape, but also with its spirit, soul, history and people. All it takes is a few days shared with the locals, and their hospitality will make you a part of their culture and their particular, pure lifestyle. If you're visiting Crete for the very first time, prepare to fall head over heels for this land of wonder. If you've been here before, then it's already your home away from home.







CRETE. GENERAL INFORMATION.

Where:

Crete is located in the south Aegean; it is the fifth largest isle in the Mediterranean and the southernmost tip of Europe.



Why:

Crete is a destination able to satisfy all travel desires and offer any kind of activity. The isle was the cradle of the Minoan civilization, the very first civilization in Europe, with numerous monuments of great historical importance to prove it. Along thousands of miles of coastline, visitors can find countless, fantastic beaches. Inland Crete offers an all-year-round alternative to seaside holidays. And as far as hospitality goes, getting to know the locals is a unique experience. In Crete, you're bound to find a home away from home, as well as a new family.



Make sure to taste:

Make sure to taste: The world-famous Cretan cuisine, considered the best example of Mediterranean diet, which in turn is widely accepted as the healthiest and most wholesome way of eating. Typical dishes you mustn't miss include: dakos (rusk topped with fresh tomato and xynomizithra cheese), sautéed snails, kalitsounia (small, sweet or savory pies), small dumplings with mizithra cheese—actually, all kinds of small, fried dumplings are worth trying—lamb casserole with stamnagathi (a local variety of wild greens), artichokes in egg and lemon sauce, gamopilafo (pilau rice traditionally cooked for wedding celebrations), pies from the region of Sfakia, lamb antikristo and rakomelo (Cretan raki and honey). Tsikoudia, the local spirit, is also quite famous. Let yourself get carried away; don't turn down the hospitable locals when they offer you a shot. Tsikoudia is the indispensable accompaniment to every activity, starting as early as noon, until late at night in traditional coffee houses, at home, or while celebrating big moments.



Attend:

Wine festivals, religious festivals in towns or villages, traditional wedding fiestas and Renaissance fairs.

How to go:

Heraklion, Chania and Sitia are connected by air with the rest of Greece, as well as with direct flights from several European cities. The ports of Heraklion and Chania (Souda) are connected daily with the Greek mainland (Piraeus), while the port of Heraklion, which also serves as a base for cruise ships, is connected by ferry to the Cyclades during the summer months, offering visitors the opportunity for island hopping. The port of Kissamos in Chania is connected to Kythera and Gythio, while the port of Sitia is connected to the Dodecanese (Kasos, Karpathos, Rhodes, Halki) and the islands of Milos and Santorini. Agios Nikolaos port in Lasithi mainly welcomes cruise ships.





Where to stay:

Crete offers dozens of different accommodation options. Luxury seaside resorts with bungalows and spas, boutique hotels, private mansions, tasteful guesthouses and hotels of all categories, adult-only hotels and ecotourist lodgings or refurbished houses in traditional villages will make you feel as if you were a member of the community. The countless accommodation options can satisfy the needs of all travelers whether they are couples, groups, families or disabled people. In particular, resorts offer everything from sports equipment to day cruises and cultural tours.



Children's special:

Don't miss out on the chance to visit the Cretaquarium in Heraklion, as well as the water parks in Heraklion and Chania, both boasting gargantuan water slides.







20 MUST-VISIT DESTINATIONS

1. Old town of Chania

Stroll in the romantic atmosphere of narrow alleys, admire the restored palaces once belonging to Venetian doges, and let yourself get carried away by the charms of the historical port of the city.

2. Gramvousa Fortress and Balos Lagoon

Imeri Gramvousa is famous for its beach and its imposing Venetian castle. Balos, with its turquoise waters and exotic landscape, needs no special introduction.





3. Elafonissi and Kedrodasos

There is definitely a bit of Caribbean in Crete, along the magical Elafonissi beach of turquoise water and pinkish-white sand of broken shells. Kedrodasos is a small earthly paradise of 110 acres full of sea cedars, sand dunes and white sand.



4. Samaria Gorge

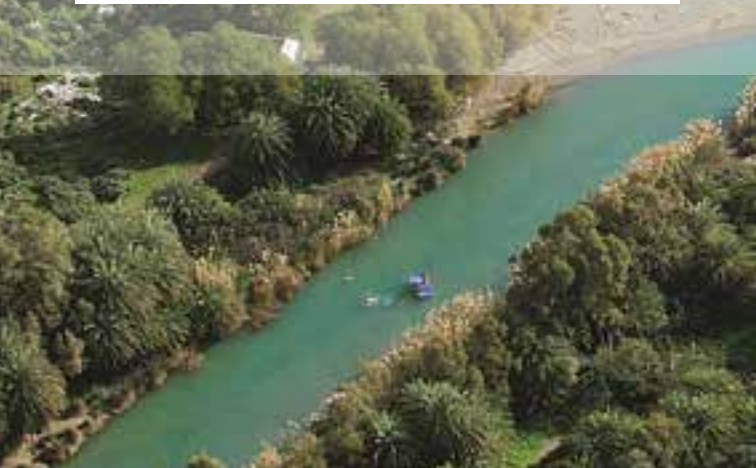
Take a walk along one of the most impressive gorges in Europe, which is over 18 km long. The gorge offers a rare experience to visitors, being relatively easy to trek through and at the same time boasting plenty of unique protected species of plants and animals.

5. New Archaeological Museum of Chania in Chalepa

The permanent exhibition is organized in five thematic aspects highlighting the daily life and organization of the inhabitants during prehistoric and historical times.

6. Preveli Monastery and Lake Preveli

Visit the historic monastery where the great evacuation of the Allied troops was mapped out during World War II, then relax in the welcoming embrace of a charming sandy beach lined with exotic palm trees.





7. Old town of Rethymno

Particularly romantic visitors are bound to be thrilled by the historical center of Rethymno with its noticeable elements of Venetian and Ottoman architecture, complemented by a vibrant city scene that never sleeps.



8. Eleftherna, Margarites, Arkadi

Take a tour of history through the museum, the ancient city and the cemeteries of Eleftherna, the traditional pottery workshops in Margarites and the monument of self-sacrifice of the Holy Monastery of Arkadi.



9. UNESCO Global Geopark of Psiloritis

Wander through a park that impresses with its geology, fascinating natural environment, culture and traditions of its people.



10. Amari Valley

An area of natural beauty with traditional villages, Byzantine churches, the impressive Potami Dam, the gorge and the cave of Agios Antonios.



11. Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Venetian walls and port of the city

Admire the treasures of ancient civilizations in one of the most important museums in Europe, hosting exhibits spanning 5,500 years of history. Enjoy a walk around the Venetian harbor and the walls of Heraklion, whose construction began in 1462 and took a century to complete. Today they are the best-preserved fortifications in the Mediterranean.



12. Knossos Palace, Archanes, Vathypetro

Be sure to have Ariadne's thread with you, and there is no risk of getting stranded in the famous Labyrinth of Knossos. Follow the signs of one of the most important European civilizations, which appeared in Crete 4,000 years ago. Visit the Minoan manor house at the archaeological site of Vathypetro with the oldest wine press and the picturesque village of Archanes.



13. Phaistos, Matala

Phaistos was one of the most important centres of Minoan civilisation until its destruction in the 1st century B.C. You certainly have heard of Matala, the wonderful beach with its carved caves made famous in the 1970s by the flower children.





14. Malia Minoan Palace, Dia Island (sailing)

Walk to the Palace of Malia, as revealed by archaeological excavations. If you want to combine sailing or mini-cruising with swimming and hiking, the island of Dia is the ideal destination.

15. Odigitria Monastery, Agiofarago Gorge

It is worth visiting the Holy Monastery of Odigitria, the so-called Mount Athos of Crete where asceticism flourished and cross the picturesque Agiofarago Gorge with its huge vertical cliffs and caves.



16. Spinalonga, Lake of Agios Nikolaos, Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos

Spinalonga, Lake of Agios Nikolaos, Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos – Visit the picturesque town of Agios Nikolaos, spread like an amphitheater overlooking the Gulf of Mirabello with Lake Voulismeni, where the nymphs of Greek mythology were said to bathe. Explore the island of Spinalonga, also known as «Island of the Lepers», which became world famous through Victoria Hislop's best-selling novel *The Island*. The Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos is being expanded, renovated and will open its doors in 2023, exhibiting findings from the Neolithic and Minoan periods to the Greco-Roman times.





17. Lassithi Plateau, Diktaean Cave

The cradle of Zeus uniquely combines natural beauty with history and mythology. The cave, shaped over 2 million years of stalactite and stalagmite formation, means a lot to speleologists and archaeologists alike, as it used to be a site of worship dedicated to the cult of Zeus. It is one of the most visited sites on the island.

18. Cruise to Chrissi or Koufonissi islands

Chrissi is small slice of heaven on earth, with emerald water, a protected cedar-tree forest, and millions of broken seashells on the sandy beach. Koufonissi or Delos of Crete is a rocky islet of stunning beauty with amazing beaches.



19. Toplou Monastery and Vai Palmgrove

Go on a guided tour of one of the most significant historic monasteries on the island. The monastery resembles a small fortress, with the 10-meter-high wall surrounding it, an imposing bell tower soaring to 33 meters, and an extensive collection of icons and artifacts revealing century-old secrets. Then walk down to the quasi-tropical sandy beach of Vai, and rest in the shade of the largest palm-tree forest in Europe.



20. Sitia Nature Park, Richtis Gorge, Zakros Minoan Palace

Take a tour in the Sitia Nature Park with about 300 caves, member of the UNESCO World Geopark Network. In the archaeological site of Zakros you will admire the Minoan palace of 1600 BC. For hiking enthusiasts, the Richtis Gorge is the perfect choice with a 3.0 km marked route.







CRETE IN MYTHOLOGY.

In Greek mythology, the Titaness Rhea is said to have hidden her new-born son, Zeus, in a cave somewhere in Crete. The baby was nourished with milk provided by the goat Amalthea, and honey provided by the nymph Melissa (Greek for bee), while legendary dancers known as Kouretes clashed their shields to prevent Zeus' infanticidal father, Cronos, from hearing the baby's cry. Thus Zeus escaped Cronus' murderous frenzy, and he was able to grow into adulthood and claim his throne as «father to gods and men alike», who ruled over the Twelve Olympians. Zeus is notorious for cheating on his wife, Hera; his extramarital affairs included one with a woman called Europa. In the form of a strong, white bull, Zeus managed to seduce and then abduct Europa. Three sons were born to their union: Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon. When Minos rose to power as the mighty king of Crete, the island thrived and became a prominent seafaring power.

Even almighty Athens had to pay tribute to Crete, until the Athenian prince Theseus slew the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a ferocious beast, whose whole body was human but had a bull's head, and was shut away in the Labyrinth. Encoded in this rich mythology are echoes not only of an influential and wealthy kingdom, but also of the most ancient among the great civilizations of Europe.







CRETE IN HISTORY.

The geographical location of Crete, right in the middle of the crossroads between Africa, Europe, and Asia, together with its mild climate, facilitated its becoming a cultural hub in as early as the Neolithic period. Prehistoric settlements appeared in Crete around 6000 BC, while the first settlers able to use bronze came to the island around 2600 BC. And so began the glorious history of the Minoan Civilization, which reached its heyday around 1950 BC. Some of the best-known Minoan palaces still bearing visible signs of all that glory can be found in Knossos, Festos, Malia, and Zakros.

A series of natural disasters in 1450 and 1400 BC, possibly related to an eruption of the volcano in Thera, eventually resulted in decay. Dorian settlers were the next to inhabit the island, followed by the Romans in later times. Later on, Crete became a province of the Byzantine Empire, before falling under Arab rule for more than a century (824-961 AD), and subsequently becoming a pirate lair with Chandax (present-day Heraklion) as its capital.





Following the Arab occupation, Crete was recaptured by the Byzantine Empire. Next came the Venetians, who would rule over the island for about 5 centuries and leave a deep mark on its culture. In 1669, the siege of Chandax signaled the beginning of the Ottoman occupation, which would be defined by continuous bloody revolts. At the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman rule came to an end, and the island became the autonomous Cretan State, with Prince George sent by Greece as its High Commissioner. Due to the tireless efforts of legendary Greek politician Eleftherios Venizelos, Crete was, at long last, formally incorporated into Greece in 1913.

CRETE. CRETAN HISTORY THROUGH THE CENTURIES.

6500 - 2600 BC

– Neolithic settlers from Asia Minor arrived at the island.

2600 - 2000 BC

– Prepalatial Period Significant growth in crafts, such as pottery, stone and seal carving, and jewelry and figurine making

2000 - 1700 BC

– Old Palace Period; the use of bronze was discovered, and the unattested proto-language was created. The first palaces were built, to be later destroyed by earthquakes.

1700-1450 BC

– New Palace Period; the golden age of Minoan Civilization.

Around 1450 BC

– Eruption of the volcano of Thera. Gradual decay of the Minoan Civilization. Destruction of Knossos around 1350 BC. Arrival of the Mycenaean settlers.

1200 BC

– The Dorians, a tribe from Northern Greece, conquered most of Crete

10th century - 1st century BC

– This was a dark time for the island, as it knew none of the glorious feats of mainland Greece during the Classical Period

67 BC - 337 AD

– Crete became a Roman province, with the city of Gortyna as its capital. Apostle Paul and his disciple Titus brought the Christian faith to the island

337 – 826 AD

– The Roman Empire was divided into the separate East and West Empires, and Crete became a province of the Byzantine (East) Empire

824 - 961 AD

– Arab rule; Gortyna was destroyed and Rabdh el-Khandak (Heraklion) became the capital

961 AD

– The Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros Phokas recaptured Crete, which once more became part of the Empire.

1204 AD

– The Venetians conquered Crete; they would rule for 465 years with Chandax (Heraklion) as their capital

15th - 16th century

– Crete became the most important hub for Byzantine arts and letters

17th century

– The Ottomans gradually subdued the cities of Crete

1669

– After a 21-year siege, the Ottomans captured Chandax and seized control of the whole island

1770

– Failed revolt against the Turks in the region of Sfakia, led by Daskalogiannis, a famous local warchief

1821 - 7

– These were the years of the Greek war of Independence against the Ottoman rule. Throughout this period, Crete remained occupied by the Turks.

1851

– The once powerful Ottoman Empire moves its Cretan capital to Chania.

1866

– The revolt in Arkadi resulted in the historic Holocaust of the Arkadi Monastery

1897 - 8

– Following an intervention by the Great Powers, Crete became an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire

1913

– Crete was incorporated into the rest of Greece

1923

– Treaty of Lausanne. Exchange of populations. Christians of Asia Minor, Muslims were deported from Crete.

1941-5

– Crete under Nazi occupation.

1960

– This year marks the beginning of widespread tourism development

1967 - 74

– These were the years of the Military Junta. The whole of Greece was under the Regime of the Colonels.

1971

– Heraklion became the new capital of the island after Chania



CRETE. THE FOUR PREFECTURES

At the crossroad between three continents and five seas, Crete has always been a meeting point for many peoples, as well as a melting pot of the most ancient and varied civilizations. The island is a uniquely colorful mosaic of mythology, history, proud and hospitable people, awe-inspiring mountains, and impressive gorges, all surrounded by crystal-clear water lapping over 1,000 km of magical beach. Being the largest island in Greece, Crete is divided in four prefectures: Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion, and Lassithi.



The four big cities of the island are the respective capitals of those prefectures. Moving west to east, we find Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion and Agios Nikolaos.

The extensive road network covers all the surface of the island. Each of the prefectures has its own distinct, local flavor and is a unique destination in its own right. Do not neglect to visit each and every one of them; after all, the heartfelt hospitality and the delicious Cretan cuisine are standard, no matter where you go.



PREFECTURE OF **Chania**

The prefecture of Chania is the westernmost prefecture of the island; to the east, it borders with the prefecture of Rethymno, while the rest is an endless coastline. As an administrative unit, it also includes the smaller isles Gavdos and Gavdopoula in the Libyan Sea, about 20 miles off the southern coast of the prefecture.

The most important cities include the capital, Chania, and Kastelli in Kissamos. The most important towns include Paleochora and Kantanos in Selino, as well as Chora Sfakion in Sfakia.





Chania

The traditional features of the city of Chania have remained unchanged since the time of Venetian occupation. Wander the alleys of the old city and listen to the echoing footsteps of conquerors through the ages. Take a tour around the Municipal Market and Chalidon Street, which will take you from the new city to the Port; catch your breath in Tsopanas before ending up at Kumkapi. On your way to the port, you can visit the Center of Mediterranean Architecture, the Kucuk Hasan mosque (also known as «Gyali Tzamisi»), the Egyptian lighthouse, or you can enjoy a nice cup of coffee at the Chania Sailing Club.

If you fancy a view from up high, you can visit Froudia, most commonly referred to as «Tafi Venizelon» (Graves of the Venizelos family). The best time to visit is in the afternoon, when the city of Chania takes on a pinkish-orange hue in the sunset. In the evening, the city gets dressed up to the nines and welcomes visitors to its numerous traditional restaurants and buzzing bars.









CULTURE/Museums

If you find yourself in Chania, you will be spoiled for choice culture-wise. Start with a stroll around the Venetian port, and continue with visits to a wide selection of museums in the city.

- **New Archaeological Museum of Chania in Chalepa**

– The permanent exhibition is organized in five thematic aspects highlighting the daily life and organization of the inhabitants during prehistoric and historical times. More than 3,500 ancient objects are housed, of which 1,000 are exhibited for the first time, in a modern 6,000 m² building. In the first showcase visitors will find objects from the first certified human presence on Gavdos.



- **Byzantine and Postbyzantine Collection of Chania**

– The collection features impressive exhibits, ranging from late ancient Christianity to the Ottoman occupation, that help the visitor piece together the history of the westernmost administrative region of Crete. The exhibits are presented as a timeline in the church of San Salvatore.

- **Maritime Museum of Crete** – Situated at the entrance to the Fortress of Firkas, the museum houses 2,500 exhibits including model ships, navigation instruments and devices, the old mechanism of the lighthouse of Chania etc. Make sure not to miss «Minoan», the life-size replica of a Minoan ship (16th-15th cent. BC), on exhibit at the Venetian Shipyards close to the Kumkapi area. The replica was built based on an experimental archeology research project using materials, tools and processes similar to those that would have been used in the Minoan era (15th cent. BC).



- **The Cretan House** – Located in the gallery of the Catholic church, the Folklore Museum faithfully depicts everyday life in Crete.

- **European Acritic Museum** – Situated in Paleochora, Chania, this museum is dedicated to the frontiersmen of Europe and their lifestyle, from King Arthur to Tristan and Isolde, and Digenis Akritas.

- **Archaeological Museum of Kissamos** – The museum collection includes exhibits dating from the Minoan age to the Hellenistic and Roman eras. Among the most impressive exhibits are the mosaics salvaged from ancient Roman villas, while numerous excavation sites can be found all around the town of Kissamos.





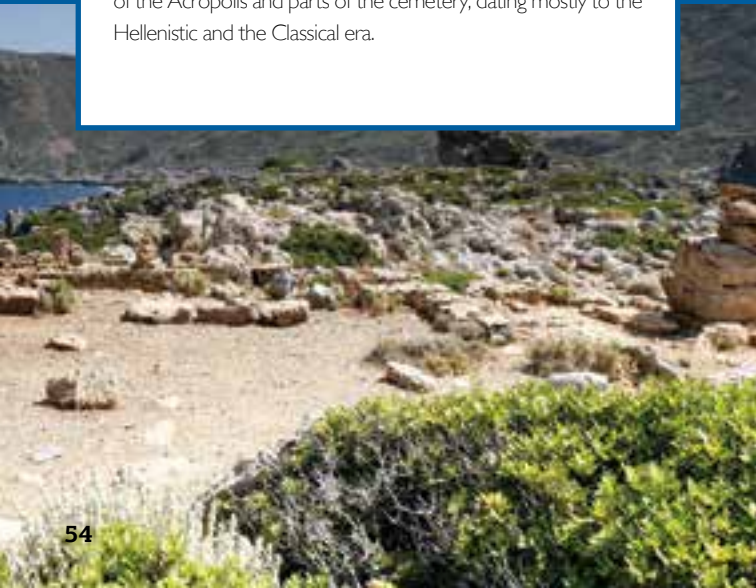
• **Eleftherios Venizelos Museum** – Visit the home of Eleftherios Venizelos (1864-1936), an important Greek politician who has served as Prime Minister of Greece an impressive seven times. Today, the building houses the National Research Foundation in Chalepa, Chania.

• **History and Folklore Museum of Therissos** – The building formerly used as Eleftherios Venizelos' headquarters now hosts archives, photographic material, weaponry and objects which belonged to the important Greek politician.



CULTURE/Archaeological sites

- **Aptera** – This significant archaeological site is what is left of the glorious city-state of the same name, which was an important commercial hub in the Roman era. According to legend, the city was named after the Sirens who, defeated by the Muses in a song contest, cut off their own wings (apteros is Ancient Greek for wingless), painted themselves white and dove into the sea, creating the island called Lefkes (Greek for white), just off the coast of Souda.
- **Ancient Falassarna**, The city became a leading maritime power in the Hellenistic era, being at the center of the commercial triangle between Greece, Africa and Asia. Today, what remains of the city is a part of the port and the walls, the ruins of the Acropolis and parts of the cemetery, dating mostly to the Hellenistic and the Classical era.





- **Ancient Lissos**, is one of the most beautiful archaeological sites in Crete, and was famous in antiquity for its thermal springs and shrine of Asclepius, god of medicine. Visitors can reach Lissos either by boat from Sougia, or on foot through a spectacular gorge.



- **The Fortress of Gramvousa** was built by the Venetians in 1579 on the isle of the same name, just off the northwest coast of the prefecture, to protect the westernmost tip of the island. Follow the narrow path, which will take you from the port to the highest point on the island. The Fortress is in quite good condition. On clear days, the Peloponnese is visible in the distance.

- A visit to **Ancient Diktyнна**, a very significant place of worship of the Hellenistic and Roman eras dedicated to the goddess Artemis Diktyнна Britomartys, is also highly recommended. Afterwards, you can enjoy a refreshing dip at the beautiful nearby beach of Menies.





TOURS - Points of interest

The impressive mountain range of Lefka Ori (White Mountains) towers over the prefecture which, for the most part, is covered by the National Protected Forest of the same name. Within the National Protected Forest of Lefka Ori lies hidden the **Gorge of Samaria**, the largest and most imposing gorge in Greece. Crossing the gorge takes about 5-6 hours, but the alternating landscape, as well as the rare resident species of flora and fauna make it worth the effort.

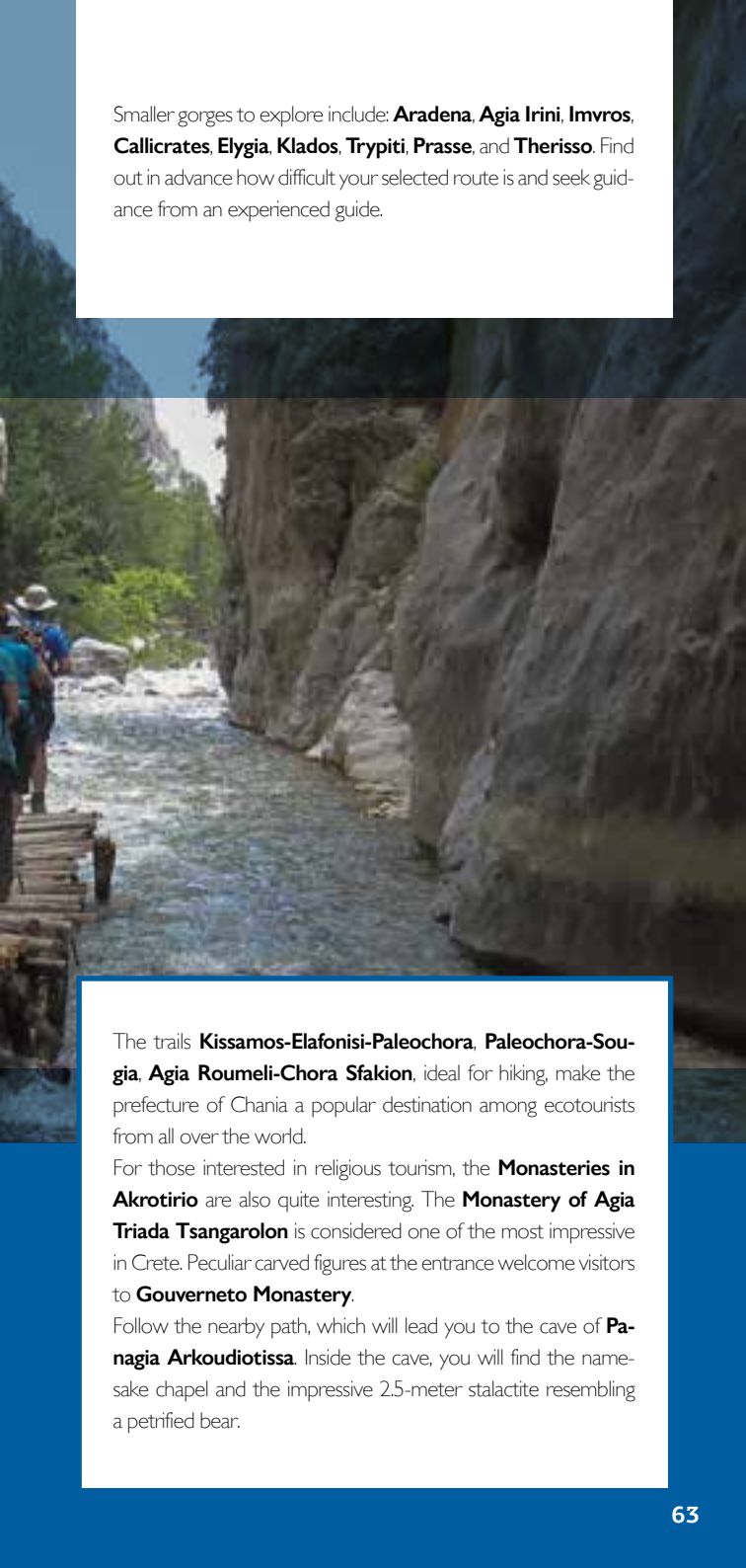












Smaller gorges to explore include: **Aradena, Agia Irini, Imvros, Callicrates, Elygia, Klados, Trypiti, Prasse,** and **Therisso**. Find out in advance how difficult your selected route is and seek guidance from an experienced guide.

The trails **Kissamos-Elafonisi-Paleochora, Paleochora-Sougia, Agia Roumeli-Chora Sfakion**, ideal for hiking, make the prefecture of Chania a popular destination among ecotourists from all over the world.

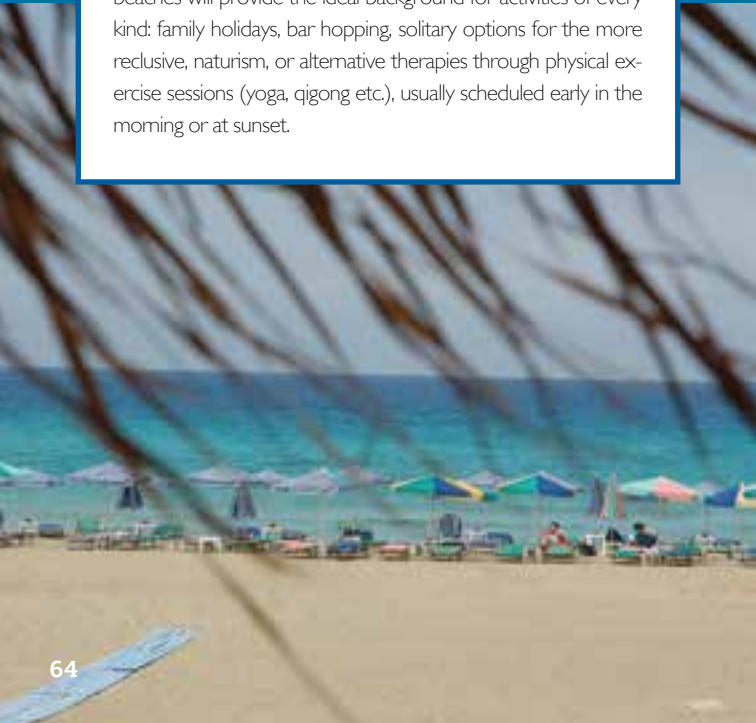
For those interested in religious tourism, the **Monasteries in Akrotirio** are also quite interesting. The **Monastery of Agia Triada Tsangarolon** is considered one of the most impressive in Crete. Peculiar carved figures at the entrance welcome visitors to **Gouverneto Monastery**.

Follow the nearby path, which will lead you to the cave of **Panagia Arkoudiotissa**. Inside the cave, you will find the namesake chapel and the impressive 2.5-meter stalactite resembling a petrified bear.



Beaches

The most popular beaches in this prefecture include **Elafonissi**, **Falassarna**, **Gramvoussa-Balos**, **Frangokastelo**, **Orthi Ammos**, the wider region of **Sfakia**, and **Paleochora**. Some of the most beautiful beaches in Chania, boasting wild natural beauty and countless small gulfs, can be found in the southern part of the isle, in **Paleochora** and **Sougia**. This extensive variety of beaches will provide the ideal background for activities of every kind: family holidays, bar hopping, solitary options for the more reclusive, naturism, or alternative therapies through physical exercise sessions (yoga, qigong etc.), usually scheduled early in the morning or at sunset.





- In 2013, **Elafonissi** was voted one of the 25 top beaches in the world by TripAdvisor. The beach features crystal-clear water and white sand, at times turning pink due to thousands of broken sea shells. Due to its particular environmental significance, the area is part of the Natura Network. A peninsula of the same name can be seen right opposite the famous beach.
- **Falassarna**, in the northeast of Chania, is also an unmissable destination for every visitor.



- **Gramvousa-Balos** is among the most exotic locations on the island. The deserted island is overlooked by the well-preserved Venetian Fortress, where a great religious festival is organized every year on 29 June, the day dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul.





- At just 1.5 km away from Elafonissi, **Kedrodassos** is a well-known spot of particular beauty. Behind a forest of short cedar trees, lies hidden a sandy beach of deep blue water.

- **Gavdos** is literally the southernmost frontier of Greece and Europe. This island, lost in the vast Libyan Sea, is definitely worth a visit from Chora Sfakion or Paleochora.







PREFECTURE OF **Rethymno**

Located between Chania and Heraklion, Rethymno is the heart of Crete. The prefecture is washed by the Cretan Sea to the north and by the Libyan Sea to the south. The greatest part of the region is marked by a rich mountainous relief, boasting caves, rivers, breathtaking gorges, verdant valleys and impressive beaches. The contrasting landscape of Rethymno provides enough variety to satisfy even the most demanding of visitors. Psiloritis, the highest mountain in Crete, is 2,456 meters high and is situated at the east part of the prefecture. Other important mountains include the Talea mountains, Vryssinas, and Kryoneritis; they are all above 850 meters high and quite cavernous, as well as places of great archaeological and historical interest.

Unique gorges slit the mountainous surface of the prefecture, including Kourtaliotiko, Kotsyfos, Patsos, Prasses, Arkadiotiko, and Myloi. The coastal landscape alternates between rocky shores and splendid beaches, such as Rethymno, Panormos, Preveli, Plakias, Episkopi, Scoinaria, Triopetra, and Agia Galini.



Inland Rethymno is equally interesting, though; visit Spili, a village with its centuries-old plane trees and fountains with gurgling waters, the mountainous settlement of Amari, with its characteristic Byzantine churches and their frescoes, Margarites with its traditional pottery workshops and Eleftheria with a new museum right next to the ancient town of the same name.



Rethymno

As you walk along the narrow streets of Rethymno, you will come across evidence of all civilizations that made this beautiful place their home. Wander through the Venetian Port, the castle of Fortezza, the most well-known landmark of the city, and the picturesque quarter of Kiouloumpasi. Make sure to take home snapshots of the fountains, especially the Rimondi Fountain, and do not miss the Historical and Folklore Museum, the Archaeological Museum of Rethymno and the Museum of Contemporary Art / «L. Kanakakis» Municipal Gallery.



Within the city you can visit the Neratze Mosque (also known as Gazi Houssein Pasha Mosque), which was originally erected in 1601 by the Venetians as a Catholic monastery in honor of Santa Maria, the Virgin Mary of the Augustinians, and was later converted to a mosque by the Turks in 1657, along with the adjacent chapel of the Christ. Today, the mosque houses the Conservatory of Rethymno. Your visit would not be complete without walking down the legendary Makri Steno and Nikephoros Phokas street for an easy stroll along an alley lined with amazing Venetian houses.







CULTURE/Museums

- **Archaeological museum** – Discover the timeless appeal of Cretan culture from the Neolithic age to the years of the Roman rule. The Museum is a true showcase of the local cultural history, and all exhibits are presented by time period and excavation site. Its collections include finds from caves, settlements and cemeteries of the Minoan era, as well as objects dating from the Geometric, Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods, found during excavations at important ancient cities. Admire the famous sculptures from Eleuthema, as well as the collection of clay death masks.



- **Historical and Folklore Museum** – Thematic exhibitions about textile making, pottery, metalwork, traditional agriculture, and professions of the past offer a glance at how everyday life changes as time goes by.

- **Museum of Palaeontology** – Located in the restored Mastampas Mosque, this beautiful little museum presents the geological and paleontological history of the island over the last 300 million years.

- **Museum of Contemporary Art - «L. Kanakakis» Municipal Gallery** – At the very heart of the old town of Rethymno, housed at an old building next to the Fortezza and the Archaeological Museum, is the Museum of Contemporary Art. With its permanent collection which includes around 400 works by contemporary Greek artists, the museum covers a wide spectrum of Greek artistic production from 1950 to the present.



• **Ecclesiastical Museum of the Metropolitan Church of Rethymno** – Located opposite the Metropolitan Church of Rethymno, the Museum houses ecclesiastical heirlooms dating from 1816 to the present, including utensils, icons, bells, and the old clock of the bell tower, which was functional from 1894 to 1986.

• **Wax Replicas Museum at Zoniana** – This private museum, run by the Potamianos family, aspires to bring Cretan history to life. After your visit, there is always time for a shot of raki in the sunshine at the square of Zoniana.

• **Wood Carving Museum at Axos** – In the entrance of the village of Axos another private museum presents more than a hundred wooden sculptures inspired by nature and folklore.

• **Museum of the Holy Monastery of Arkadi** – This museum commemorates the ultimate sacrifice of the defenders of the besieged monastery of Arkadi in 1866. The collection includes icons, mostly from the meta-Byzantine era, weaponry from the Greek war of Independence, various objects of worship, religious vestments, manuscripts, seals etc.

• **Museum of the Holy Monastery of Preveli** – One of the most beautiful monasteries on the island! Visitors can admire the elegant architecture of the monastery itself, as well as the peace-inducing landscape. The museum of the monastery houses an exceptional collection of portable icons from the period of the Cretan School of painting (17th-19th century), which is definitely worth visiting.

• **Chromonastiri Military Museum** – The museum features authentic firearms, helicopters and airplanes belonging to the Greek Army in their actual form and dimensions. The permanent and temporary exhibitions of military memorabilia help visitors of all ages remember crucial points in the nation's history.



• **Roustika Ecclesiastical Museum** – The village of Roustika is home to the ecclesiastical museum of the same name, where visitors can see an Epitaph casket embroidered in gold, as well as icons and various ecclesiastical objects. Next to the museum is the Byzantine church of the village (14th century), decorated with very interesting frescoes.

CULTURE /Archaeological sites

A host of important **archaeological** finds suggest that the area flourished in antiquity, from as early as the Stone Age and well into the late ancient Christian period. Ancient Eleutherna, inhabited since the 8th cent. BC, and the cemetery in Armenoi are of particular interest among the unearthed archaeological sites.





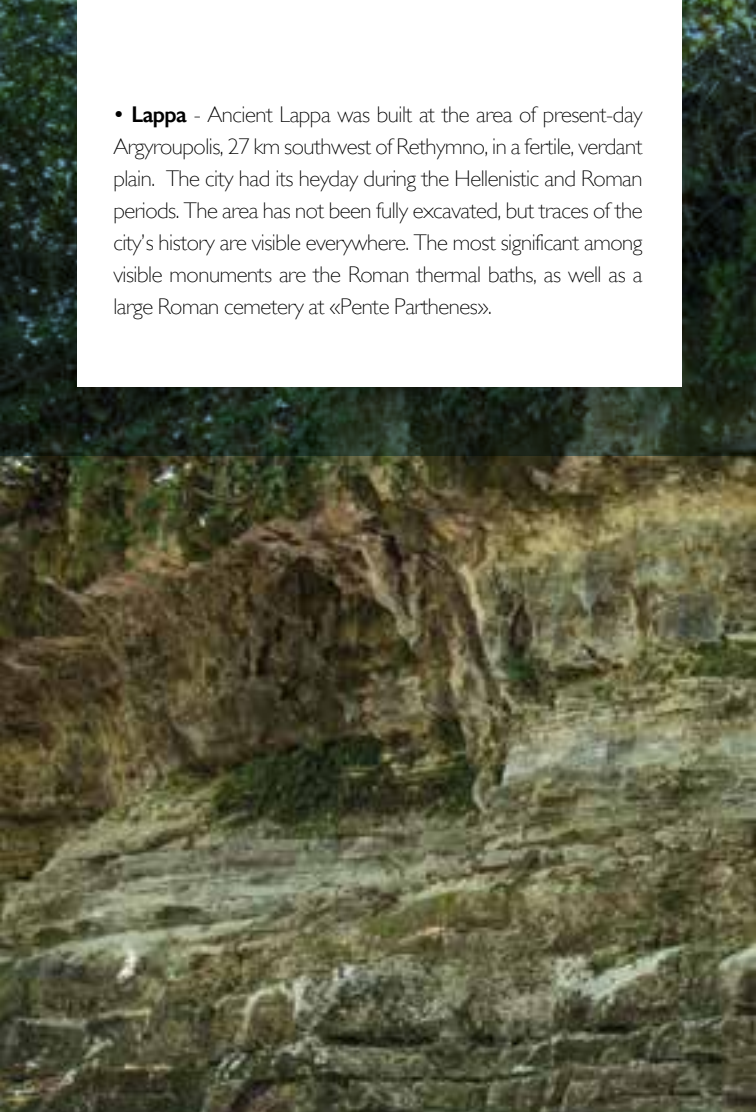
• **Archaeological Site of Eleutherna – Archaeological Museum** - Just outside Rethymno, visitors can find the ancient city and Necropolis of Eleutherna. Eleutherna is considered a «buried enigma» that hasn't been solved in 29 centuries. You can also include a visit to the **famed Arkadi Monastery** in the same excursion. Excavations in Eleutherna started in 1985, when the Department of Archaeology and History of Art of the University of Crete decided to try and unearth a city consistently mentioned in the literary testimonia. The Archaeological Museum of Eleutherna opened its doors to the public in June 2016.

• **Syritos** – This is another ancient Minoan city in the Prefecture of Rethymno, south of the ancient city of Eleutherna. Built on a strategic location, it evolved into a powerful independent city, which is further confirmed by the fact that it was one of the first Cretan cities to mint coins. The ruins of the city include parts of the acropolis, houses decorated with mosaics, pottery, statuettes, and metal housewares.






• **Axos** – Built high upon the northern slopes of Psiloritis, Axos was in full bloom already in the late Minoan and the Geometric period. The ancient ruin layer includes the acropolis, part of which is still visible atop the hill, the temple of Aphrodite, domed tombs, and part of the ancient wall. Out of a total of 46 Byzantine churches, only nine have made it to modern times. They are either frescoed or decorated with mosaics.



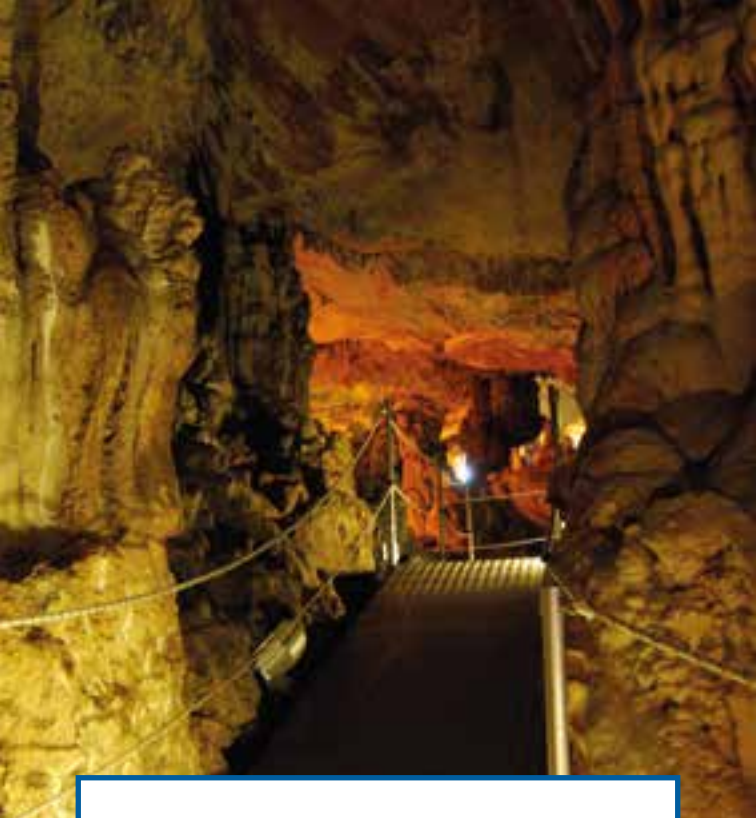
- **Lappa** - Ancient Lappa was built at the area of present-day Argyroupolis, 27 km southwest of Rethymno, in a fertile, verdant plain. The city had its heyday during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The area has not been fully excavated, but traces of the city's history are visible everywhere. The most significant among visible monuments are the Roman thermal baths, as well as a large Roman cemetery at «Pente Parthenes».



- **Minoan settlements Apodoulou and Monastiraki** – These are important Minoan settlements of the Old Palace period (19th - 16th century BC) in southern Rethymno. What is extremely important about Apodoulou is the three building complexes of the Old Palace period (1950-1700 BC), and the domed tombs enclosing abundant finds from the Post-Palace period (1380-1200 BC). Monastiraki boasts an equally important, two-floor building complex presenting features of palatial architecture.



• **Late Minoan Cemetery at Armenoi** – The Minoan necropolis of Armenoi is located 9 km south of the city of Rethymno. It is the largest excavated cemetery of the Late Minoan III A-B period (1400-1200 BC). Systematic excavations, which started as early as 1969, have so far unearthed more than 350 tombs. Many of these tombs had not been defiled, therefore they were full of rich offerings.



Tours

- **Nida Plateau:** 79 km southeast of the city of Rethymno, on Mt Psiloritis, one can find the impressive Nida Plateau. The famous mitata, the shepherds' domed, stone-built lodgings, are the trademark of the plateau. The plateau has the appropriate infrastructure for winter sports.
- **The peculiar relief** of the area is marked by the presence of lots of impressive caves. The most important among them include Gerani, Simonelli (west of the city of Rethymno), Agios Antonios in the province of Amario, Melidoni, Sfendoni (also known as Tripa), and Mouggi Sisson. In Greek mythology, the cave known as Ideo Antro on Mt Ida or Psiloritis, the highest mountain in Crete, is the cave where Zeus was secretly brought up. In antiquity, the cave was an important place of worship not only in the Minoan, but well through the Roman period. Being one of the most prestigious worship caves in Crete, it flourished during the period of antiquity (4000 BC to 1st century AD) and is rightfully numbered among the greatest Panhellenic shrines.

- **Argyroupolis:** A picturesque mountainous village in a verdant area, built on the ruins of the ancient city of Lappa (27 km southwest of Rethymno). It is certainly worth clearing some time in your schedule to visit the area of the springs and admire the dense wild flora, the small waterfalls and the century-old trees, as well as the local cave and chapel.
- The mountainous formations of the region are criss-crossed by gorges of unique natural beauty: **Kourtaliotiko Gorge** (3 km long) leads to the famous beach of Preveli. **Kotsifou Gorge** starts at the village of Kanevos and leads to Plakias. Another gorge is Patsou in the province of Amario. **Prassiano Gorge** leads to Plataniás beach, east of the city of Rethymno. **Arkadi Gorge** is also worth exploring, as well as numerous other smaller gorges such as Mylon near Rethymno and Moundros near the village of the same name.





Beaches

Some of the most impressive beaches in the prefecture of Rethymno are located along the south coast of the island.

In **Plakia**, **Schinaria**, **Damnoni**, **Ammoudi** and **Rodakino**, visitors can indulge in free-diving and water sports, while Souda is more suitable for lounging and relaxing.

On the southeastern side of the prefecture, the beaches near the village of Rodakino, **Korakas** and **Polyrizos** offer crystal-clear waters, umbrellas, traditional tavernas and a few rooms to let, while **Peristeres** satisfies the need for relaxation and tranquility.

The beaches at **Ligres**, **Triopetra**, and **Agios Pavlos** are known for their imposing rocks extending into the Libyan Sea, and their deep, crystal-clear water.





• **Beach of the Preveli Monastery.** The incredibly beautiful beach of Preveli is located at a unique spot, where the Great River (Kourtaliotis) flows into the Libyan Sea and the Kourtaliotiko Gorge comes to its end. On your way to the Preveli Monastery and a while before you actually reach the monastery, you will notice a path leading to a parking area. Follow this very path to find yourselves at a sandy beach lined with countless palm-trees; enjoy an unexpected, quasi-tropical landscape without ever leaving the Mediterranean!



- Surrounded by the three mountains Asiderotas, Kedros, and Psiloritis, **Agia Galini** in Rethymno opens up into a beautiful little port teeming with life and visitors during the summer months.



- The **main beach of Rethymno** extends along the north coast of the island for approximately 13 kilometers. Along the beach, you can find both secluded and busy spots, the latter of which offer various facilities and services, including water sports. Loggerhead turtles, an endangered species also known as *Caretta caretta*, also lay their eggs along this beach.
- The beach of **Episkopi**, at the west coast of Rethymno, also offers a choice of activities. The east coast hosts the four enchanting little gulfs of **Bali** - each one beautiful in its own special way - along with **Panormos**, **Geropotamos**, and **Kitrenossi** (also known as Spilies).







PREFECTURE OF **Heraklion**

This is the largest and most densely populated prefecture in the island. It is surrounded by three mountain ranges: Ida (Psiloritis) to the west, Dikti (mountains of Lassithi) to the east, and Asteroussia to the south. Heraklion is home to some of the most significant archaeological sites in Crete, as well as enchanting beaches. Inland Heraklion is particularly charming, with picturesque villages, caverns and gorges, plateaus and verdant valleys of olive groves and vineyards, and imposing mountain ranges. Furthermore, every point of interest is supported by the most efficient tourism infrastructure in Crete. The incomparable combination of urban landscape with natural beauty makes the prefecture of Heraklion a unique destination you cannot miss!









Heraklion

The city of Heraklion is the capital of the prefecture. It is also the largest city and the largest port in the island. The airport of Heraklion is an important hub providing direct connections to mainland Greece as well as to international destinations. Beyond the hustle and bustle and the general atmosphere of a modern city, the historical center of Heraklion still bears the marks of its illustrious past.

There is an air of Venice about the city, with the impressive neo-classical buildings on **25 Avgoustou Street**, the **Koules** fortress, the **shipyards** and the **port**.

Landmarks in Heraklion include emblematic buildings, such as the **Loggia**, the **Basilica of Saint Mark**, and the **Morosini Fountain**, also known as **the Lions**.

The small square around **St Titus' church**, impressively lit in the evening, is one of the most beautiful spots in the city center.



A significant part of the city's history will be revealed to you with a stroll along the **Venetian wall** enclosing Chandax, the old town of Heraklion. Enjoy the view from the wall that once made Heraklion the city with the strongest fortification in the Mediterranean. Those who wish to pay their respects to acclaimed Cretan novelist Nikos Kazantzakis (1883 – 1957), whose notable works include *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Zorba the Greek*, can visit his tomb at the Martinengo Bastion, a triangular structure within the wall offering a fantastic view of the city.





CULTURE/Museums

The prefecture of Heraklion also boasts **numerous thematic museums** which retrace the city's glorious past in an exemplary manner, while catering to the local demand for intense cultural activity:



- The **Archaeological Museum** is considered one of the most important museums in the world, being the repository of the Minoan civilization. The glorious history now lost in centuries past can still be seen in thousands of archaeological finds, including the Festos Disc, the golden necklace found at Malia, and the clay dancers from Kamilari.
- The newly built **Archaeological Museum of Messara** will open to the public by 2023 and will host important findings from the wider area of Messara.

- The **History Museum** of Heraklion chronicles the evolution of the city through time. Among the exhibits, three paintings by El Greco and several manuscripts by Nikos Kazantzakis are of particular interest.

- The **Museum of Cretan Ethnology** at Vori brings to life everyday scenes from old Crete, and showcases snapshots of the popular culture of the island.

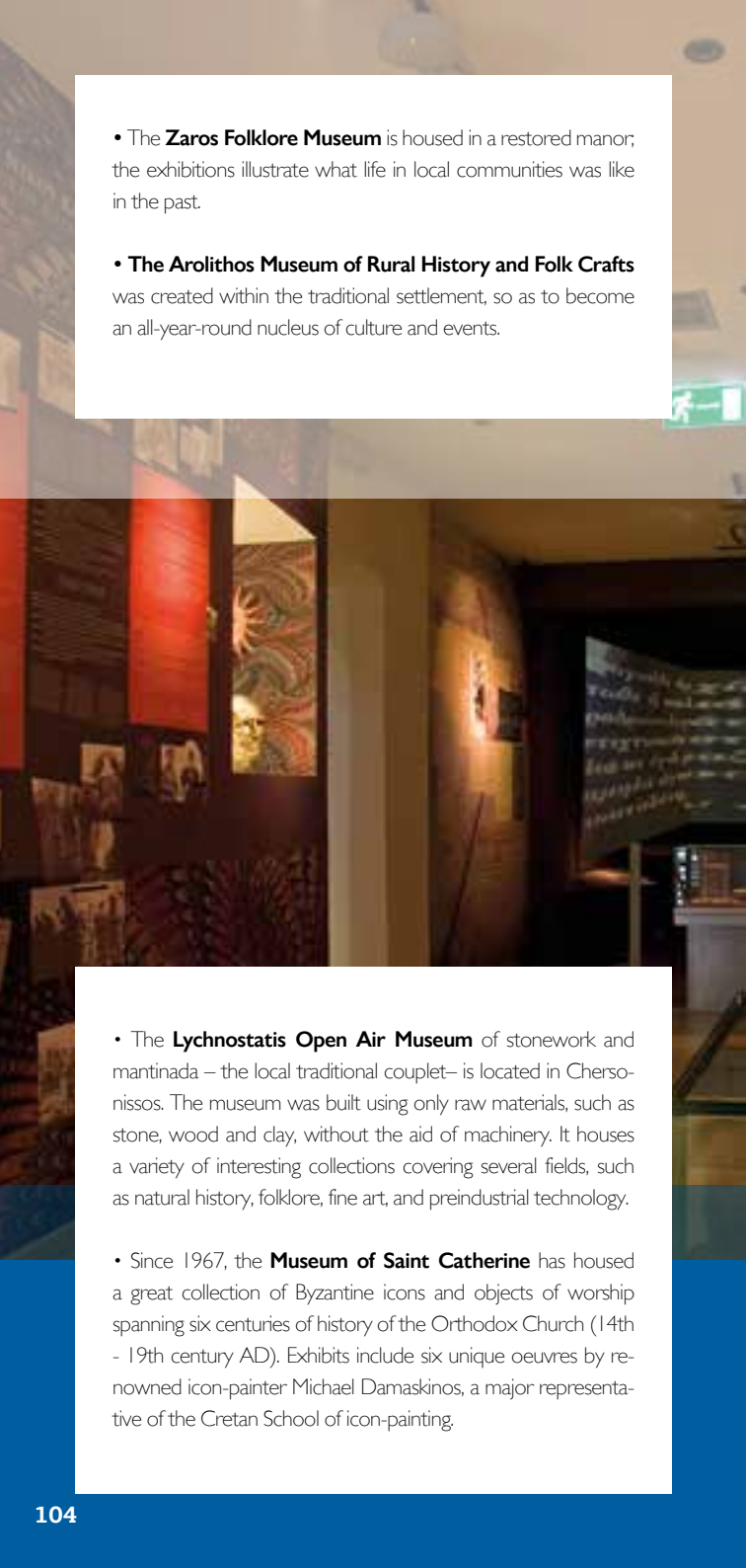
- The **Natural History Museum** at Dermatas Cove, where visitors have the opportunity to personally interact with original, 3D exhibits.



- The **Nikos Kazantzakis Museum** is located in Myrtia –the novelist’s birthplace. Using modern methods, visitors have the opportunity to enjoy the magnificent life and days of Nikos Kazantzakis.

The museum houses the novelist’s manuscripts, rare photos, personal objects, material from performances of his plays, portraits and sculptures, as well as dozens of translations and first editions of his works.

- Exhibits at the **Menelaos Parlamas Museum of Rural Life** at Piskopiano, Chersonissos, focus on the Cretan countryside and rural life. The collection includes a blacksmith’s workshop, a wine press, a rakokazano –traditional cauldron used in the making of local spirits– and other objects dating back to the 19th century.



• The **Zaros Folklore Museum** is housed in a restored manor; the exhibitions illustrate what life in local communities was like in the past.

• **The Arolithos Museum of Rural History and Folk Crafts** was created within the traditional settlement, so as to become an all-year-round nucleus of culture and events.

• The **Lychnostatis Open Air Museum** of stonework and mantinada – the local traditional couplet– is located in Chersonissos. The museum was built using only raw materials, such as stone, wood and clay, without the aid of machinery. It houses a variety of interesting collections covering several fields, such as natural history, folklore, fine art, and preindustrial technology.

• Since 1967, the **Museum of Saint Catherine** has housed a great collection of Byzantine icons and objects of worship spanning six centuries of history of the Orthodox Church (14th - 19th century AD). Exhibits include six unique oeuvres by renowned icon-painter Michael Damaskinos, a major representative of the Cretan School of icon-painting.

• **Cretaquarium** – A visit to the aquarium is bound to impress children and adults alike. The Mediterranean scenery is showcased in 60 tanks varying in volume from 125 to 900,000 liters, creating 100 observation points where visitors can admire some 2,500 Mediterranean and tropical species. Groundbreaking interactive applications contribute to a comprehensive and unique visitor experience.





IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

A dense network of archaeological sites in the prefecture highlights the importance of the area in antiquity. Excavation finds have shown that settlers were already present in the Neolithic era.

Discover Crete's tumultuous history through the centuries:

- In **Knossos**, you will find the cradle of the Minoan civilization, one of the most ancient and glorious civilizations in human history. The palace of Knossos is situated on the Kefala hill and it commands an excellent view of the surrounding forests, olive groves and vineyards. All evidence points to the fact that Knossos was a local seat of power as well as an important administrative and religious center that used to serve the greater area.

A throne room was discovered on the west wing of the complex. The east wing contains the royal quarters, the hall of the double axes, and the queen's chamber (megaron) with the famous dolphin frescoes. In the north end of the east wing were situated the craftsmen workshops (the stone-cutter's workshop is a particular highlight) and the storage rooms that reach all the way to west wing.



One of the most important Minoan frescoes, the Prince of the Lilies, adorns the wall of the south entrance to the Central Court of the palace. Unfortunately, only small fragments of the original fresco have survived; most of it is a modern reconstruction.



- In the area of **Archanes** (very close to Knossos) you can visit the palace complex in the village with the same name, the biggest prehistoric graveyard in the Aegean Sea near the village of Fourni, the Minoan mansion at Vathipetro with the impressive «lino» (wine press), and the shrine at Anemospilia.

- If you venture near Kastelli Pediados, you can also visit **ancient Lyttos** (or Lyktos), a colony of Sparta and one of the most powerful ancient cities of Crete.

- In **Festos**, visitors can admire the second most important administrative, economic and religious center of Minoan Crete, after the palace at Knossos. The palace of Festos was built around 1900 BC and it covers an area of 18,000 sq.m. (it's the second-largest surviving Minoan palace, surpassed only by the one in Knossos).





- **Gortyna**, a powerful ancient city in the plain of Messara, is worth a visit, as Plato himself praised it for its administrative system and legislation. The **late ancient Christian basilicas** built on the ruins of ancient temples are also of significant historical interest. The basilica of **St Titus** is the most impressive among them.

- The palace at **Malia** is very similar to the ones in Knossos and Festos. It was erected during the same period as the other two palaces and it follows the same, labyrinthine layout which focuses on a central court and expands outwards with storage rooms, workshops, ritual chambers, sacred crypts, royal quarters and other facilities. One of the most famous finds at the archaeological site of Malia is the golden necklace with the bee motif, a true masterpiece of Minoan craftsmanship.



TOURS - Points of interest

- Discover the **natural beauty** of an area boasting amazing gorges (including Karteros, Rouvas, Almyros, Voriziano, Astrakiano, Kounaviano), the **Mt Giouchtas Eco-Archaeological Park**, as well as numerous caves, most of which are accessible by visitors. Explore the Agia Paraskevi Cave, said to have been part of the Minoan Labyrinth, or the archaeologically important Faneromeni Cave. Do not neglect to visit the valuable ecosystem of **Asterousia**, which is now included in the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves.



- Walk along the **long-distance path** known as E4, which crosses the prefecture from Mt Psiloritis to the west to Mt Dikti to the east. Between the two lie some of the most important trails and settlements of the area. Suggested routes: A relatively easy trail is the one from Akolyta to **Zaro** (approximately a 6.5-hour walk). Another, equally interesting trail to Zaro is the one starting at the spring of Analipsi at **Nida Plateau** and going on through the **forest of Rouvas** and around the artificial Lake Votomos, guaranteeing a unique hiking experience. This relatively accessible trail is 22 km long.

- Do not neglect to visit **Myrtia**, a picturesque little village whose points of interest include the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum and the Neraidospilio Cave next to the beautiful lake. The village is only a stone's throw away from Peza, where you can visit traditional oil mills and wineries. In nearby Astrakoi, visitors can see the watermills and springs providing Heraklion with water.

- Enjoy a refreshing getaway at the internationally acclaimed Archanes traditional settlement, where fine Cretan wine is made from the local vines. Important archaeological sites, including Vathypetro and the Minoan Cemetery at Fourni, are close in case you fancy a visit. A hike on nearby Mt Giouchtas is also highly recommended.





- One of the most beautiful trails in the south of the prefecture is the one starting at Stermes and ending at Koudoumas Monastery, which is located at a small cove in the coast bordering the Libyan Sea. Hikers treading the rough land of the Asteroussia range will have the chance to admire the wild beauty of the local fauna and flora.

- If it is inner peace you seek, you can walk along the Agiofaraggio Gorge; a splendid beach on the Libyan Sea awaits at the end of a mild hike. Give in to the charm of the scenery; for centuries, those gloriously shaped caverns and rock faces were a place of hermitage. On your way to the beach, you will find the well-preserved church of St Anthony (14th century). For those who prefer to omit the hike without missing out on the crystal-clear water of Agiofaraggio beach, there are boat services to the beach from Kokkinos Pyrgos, Agia Galini, or Kaloi Limenes.







Beaches

Even the most demanding of visitors will be stunned by the sheer beauty of the beaches in the prefecture of Heraklion. Discover them! Apart from **Matala**, one of the hottest destinations in the world since the time of flower power and the hippie movement, the prefecture of Heraklion boasts numerous beaches ranging from the peaceful and secluded to the fully organized, offering sports and entertainment activities, as well as restaurants and beach bars. Just to mention a few, you can enjoy a dip in **Amnisos**, Tripiti, the disabled-accessible **Ammoudara** and **Karteros**, the impressive **Tris Ekklisies**, and the secluded **Maridaki**. In the north of the prefecture, try Limanakia in Chersonissos, Potamos in Malia, and the isle of Dia. Some of the most impressive beaches in the prefecture are **Kokkini Ammos** (=red sand) and Kommos on the south coast.



Those who seek perfect calm should visit the **small gulf close to Koudoumas Monastery, Voidomatis, Keratokampos and Agiofaraggio**, which is close to a famous hermitage site. The beach of Chrissostomos at Kalo Limenes is worth a visit. Ruins of the port of the ancient city of Lasea are still visible on the seabed, in the area between the rocky beach and the small island just off the coast.







PREFECTURE OF **Lassithi**

Located at the eastern tip of Crete, the prefecture of Lassithi takes visitors by surprise with its inherent contrasts. Beyond the dazzling glamor of world-class holiday resorts and lavish hotels lies a world of beautiful, unspoilt mountain villages, secluded beaches, unknown archaeological sites, and Byzantine chapels. In the prefecture of Lassithi, visitors will be spoiled for choice: entertainment and nightlife are combined with glamorous comfort, inner peace, and history.









Agios Nikolaos

The modern capital of the prefecture is the only city in Crete with so many beaches within city limits. In the summer, visitors swarm to admire the breathtaking views over the gulf of Mirabello (which literally means «beautiful view»), a name given to the area by the Venetians, who were obviously enchanted by the deep blue sea. Tourists gather at the famous bars around the port and picturesque Lake Voulismeni (actually a sinkhole connected to the sea through a narrow channel). Take a stroll near the boats in the lake, and along the port to Kitroplateia beach. Cross the small bridge connecting the two edges of the lake, then take your time and browse in the dozens of shops you will find along the beautiful alleys.

The city can also take pride in its museums –the Folklore Museum is worth visiting– as well as an exceptional network of pedestrian areas for easy walks and chats over a cup of coffee; last but not least, a perfectly organized marina of European standards.





Ierapetra

Ierapetra (35 km south of Agios Nikolaos) is the largest city in the prefecture of Lassithi, as well as the sunniest and most southern city in Europe. Landmarks of the city include the imposing Kales – the 13th cent. Venetian fortress at the port entrance– the mosque in the old city (19th cent.), the old Ottoman School, located at the Town Hall Square, which now houses the Archaeological Collection, and several important Byzantine churches. Very close to the city, visitors can find the Folklore Museum at Vainia (3.5 km to the northeast), the artificial lake at Bramiana, the Minoan settlements at Myrtos (16 km to the east), and the volcanic island of Chrissi (also known as Gaidouronissi), with its amazing white sandy beaches and cedar trees. It is worth crossing the gorge of Sarakina of unique beauty and visiting the Selakano forest (35 km NW), one of the most important preserved ecosystems of the island.







Sitia

The area of Sitia is marked by the active port to the northeast of the island, which connects Crete with the Dodekanese islands. Sitia is the birthplace of poet Vitsentzos Komaros, mostly known for his extensive poetic romance *Erotokritos*. Exploring the wider area of Sitia (70 km east of Agios Nikolaos) will reward the daring with largely unknown treats, which have managed to remain unspoilt by the passage of time: marvelous natural scenery, impressive gorges (Agioi Pantes, Richtis, Zakros, Xerokampos, Pervolakia), and interesting little villages invisible at first sight, hidden away on steep hill slopes or peninsulas.



Visitors can also enjoy a wide choice of important monasteries (Toplou, Kapsa, and Faneromeni) and archaeological sites, beaches lined with palm trees, coves with shimmering water, and spectacular routes through the proud mountains surrounding the area. If you love cruises, there are many options to visit Koufonissi, a paradise on earth with stunning beaches.

CULTURE/Museums

- **Archaeological Museum of Sitia.** The exhibits on display at the museum cover a period of about 4,000 years spanning from the late Neolithic to the late Roman era, and are mainly categorized and presented by location. The gold and ivory (chryselephantine) figurine from the Minoan city of Palekastro is considered the most famous artifact in the museum's collection.
- The **Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos** is being expanded, renovated and will open to the public in 2023, exhibiting findings from the Neolithic and Minoan periods to the Greco-Roman times.

- **Archaeological Collection of Ierapetra** The museum is housed at the registered heritage building of the Commercial Ottoman School. Visitors have the chance to admire numerous finds from excavation sites in the wider area, dating to the Minoan, Classical and Hellenistic periods.

- **Toplou Monastery Museum** This valuable collection includes old engravings and maps (mainly copperplate etchings dating to the 18th-19th century), important meta-Byzantine icons by well-known painters, and one of the very few surviving original copies of Suda, the famous Byzantine encyclopedic lexicon.


• **Archaeological and Folklore Collection of Myrtos.** Exhibits include finds from the early Minoan period excavated at Fournou Koryfi Hill, as well as finds from the Minoan mansion at Pyrgos Hill. What is really unique, however, is the extensive collection of coins dating from the 3rd century to 1968. One room of the museum is dedicated to the history of the village, mainly focusing on WWII. The exhibits are mostly weapons and various objects pertaining to warfare.



• **Folklore Museum of Sitia.** The museum houses exhibits from the 19th and early 20th century. Visitors can take a vivid look into everyday life in old Sitia through famed woven textiles of high craftsmanship, wood carvings, traditional local costumes, household items, and icons.

CULTURE /Archaeological sites

The Minoan Settlements in Myrtos – Visit the early Minoan settlement Fournou Koryfi, discovered in 1968-1969. The workshops and the more than 90 rooms discovered were all uniform in size, which probably means there was no social stratification at the time. The equipment in one of the workshops included pottery wheels, confirming that, even 5,000 years ago, pottery was already a quite sophisticated craft.




Just outside Myrtos, along the river bank on the way to Ierapetra, lies the Minoan settlement of Pyrgos, which flourished soon after Fournou Koryfi. Atop the hill is a luxurious structure built to the architectural standards of Minoan palaces, while the rest of the houses, workshops and storage rooms are spread around this larger structure. The structure at the top of Pyrgos Hill was, in all probability, the home of the local lord. This is to say that, unlike the settlement at Fournou Koryfi, the population of Pyrgos followed some kind of social stratification.



• **The palace in Kato Zakros**, dating to the late Minoan period, is a site of great archaeological significance. Spanning over 8,000 square meters, the palace was divided into more than 300 rooms, many of them decorated with magnificent frescoes. Today, the archaeological museums of Sitia and Heraklion house the priceless finds from the palace treasury.


• **The mansion in Etia** is considered one of the most important surviving monuments of authentic Venetian architecture in the Cretan countryside. Out of the original three floors, only the first and part of the second still survive.

• **The Minoan city at Roussolakos**, close to Palekastro, is one of the largest Minoan cities in Crete. It covered an area of more than 50,000 square meters, while it was quite densely populated and had no fortification. The most important archaeological finds from the area include the gold and ivory (chryselefantine) statuette known as the Palaikastro Kouros, as well as a tablet on which is inscribed the Hymn to Zeus Cretagenes (Cretan-born Zeus).



- **The archaeological site of Gournia - Minoan palace complex:** Gournia was also called «Pompeii of Minoan Crete». It is the most characteristic example of a medium-sized settlement from the Minoan heyday. It is built on a hill, very close to the sea and is visible from the road of Agios Nikolaos - Ierapetra.

- **The ancient city of Lato,** whose ruins are located about 3 km from the village of Kritsa. The city was built at a naturally fortified location, between two hilltops that would become its acropolises, and overlooking the gulf of Mirabello.



- **Driros,** another important ancient city, is located on Mt Kadistos, 2 km east of Neapolis. The city came to light in 1855, when two farmers from Neapolis unearthed a square column, bearing an inscription of the late 3rd cent. BC on all four of its sides. The archaeological site includes two acropolises, the Delphinion –a temple dedicated to the cult of Apollo Delphinios– and a large water cistern.

- **Ancient Pressos** is about 13 km from Sitia. The city was built on three hills –which were its acropolises– and ruled over the whole central part of Sitia. The ruins of Pressos cover an extensive period spanning from the Neolithic to the late Hellenistic era (144 BC) . It was an important center for the Eteocretes, namely the native Cretan population.

- The ruins of **ancient Itanos** can be found 27 km east of Sitia, close to the Vai palm-tree forest. The area is more widely known as Erimoupoli or Ermoupoli. It played a significant role as a hub for transit trade and developed commercial relationships with the Near and Middle East, where it exported the invaluable purple dye, sponges, glass, and fish products. Today, the surviving ruins include a guardhouse tower, a large late ancient Christian church, a Hellenistic quarter, two more late ancient Christian churches, and the cemetery outside the city.




- **Ancient Lefki** (=white) is located on present-day Koufonissi, a small island in the Libyan Sea off the southeastern coast of Crete, close to Cape Goudoura. Limestone is abundant in the area, so the city owes its name to the white rocks and sand. Ruins dating to the Hellenistic and Roman eras can be found everywhere on the island. The most important find, however, is the ancient theater. So far, the scene and supporting spaces, as well as fragments of the wall coating, have been excavated.

TOURS in eastern Crete

- **The Lassithi Plateau** is the largest plateau in Greece, at an altitude of about 800 m. The secrets of the plateau include the **Diktaion Antron**, the cave where Zeus was born according to Greek mythology. The impressive display of stalactites and stalagmites makes this natural monument a crucial point of interest for visitors to the plateau.

- **Vai Palm-tree Forest.** You are bound to fall head-over-heels for this quasi-exotic scenery of unique beauty. Magical beyond expectation, the palm-tree forest spans over 25,000 square meters, which makes it the largest in Europe. Due to the indigenous Cretan date palms (*Phoenix Theophrasti*), the forest has been a protected area since 1973.



- Ascend to the **summit of Thrypti**, at an altitude of 850 meters, and admire the breathtaking view to the north or to the south, towards the Libyan Sea.

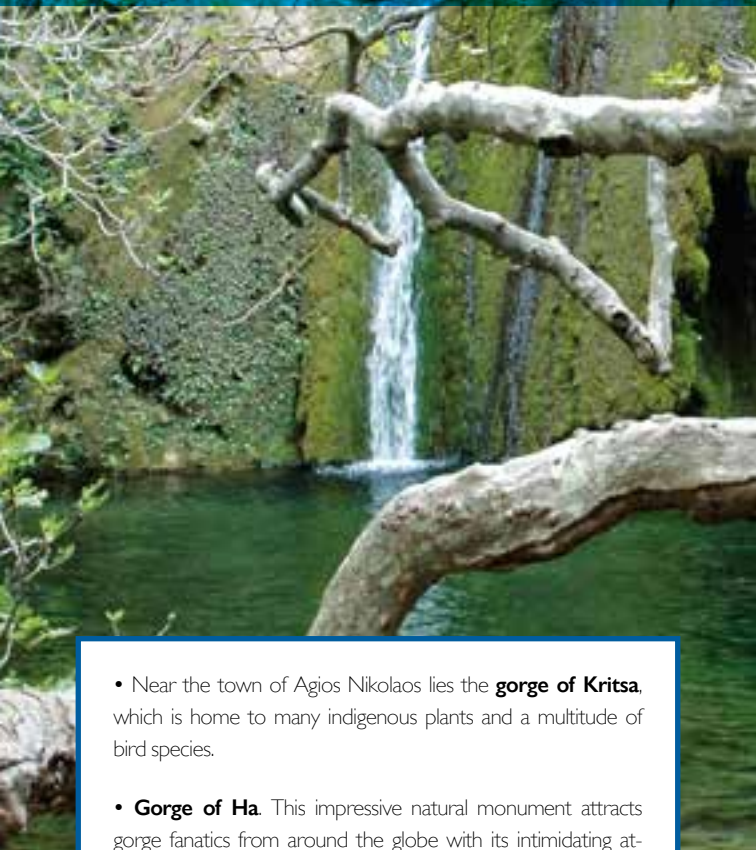
- **Sarakina Gorge.** West of Ierapetra, close to the village of Mythoi, you will find the awe-inspiring and beautiful Sarakina Gorge. It is just 1.5 km long, but the rock faces surrounding it can be as high as 150 meters. The usual way to cross the gorge is through the dam. The mild ascent to the dam takes about 1 hour, while the descent takes 45 minutes. The exit of the gorge leads to a wide river bed ending at the village of Myrtos after a few miles' walk.



• **Sitia Natural Park.** Ideal for long hikes into the wild, the Sitia Natural Park covers almost the entire east coast of Crete as well as the neighboring mainland. The park is a unique mosaic of natural habitats and ecosystems, some of which are one of a kind in the Mediterranean –such as the Vai palm-tree forest.

- **Richtis Gorge.** The verdant Richtis Gorge and the arched stone bridge of Lachanas (19th century) connect Ag. Nikolaos with Sitia. The gorge starts right off the village of Ekso Mouliana, and leads to the beach of the same name.

- **Gorge of the Dead.** Located at the end of the E4 European long-distance path, the gorge ends at the beach of Kato Zakros, an area of great archaeological interest.



- Near the town of Agios Nikolaos lies the **gorge of Kritsa**, which is home to many indigenous plants and a multitude of bird species.

- **Gorge of Ha.** This impressive natural monument attracts gorge fanatics from around the globe with its intimidating atmosphere and untamed beauty. Crossing the gorge demands a high degree of expertise and as a result it is only accessible to seasoned mountaineers bearing special equipment. Towards the end of the gorge, the great Mastoras Waterfall cascades down the side of the mountain from an altitude of 215 meters.



- **The island of Spinalonga**, also known as the «Island of the Lepers», which became famous the world over with Victoria Hislop's best-selling novel *The Island*. Today, it attracts thousands of visitors from around the world.

- The uninhabited islands of **Chrissi** (also known as Gaidouronissi) and **Koufonissi** are two slices of heaven on Earth worth visiting. Chrissi with a maximum length of 5 km and an average width of 1 km, with turquoise waters and fine white sand, will definitely be unforgettable. The exotic Koufonissi with its crystal-clear turquoise waters and sandy beaches will also enchant you.



Beaches

Beaches of unparalleled beauty cover the entire coastline of the prefecture of Lassithi.

The **beach of Vai** is arguably the most famous beach on the entire island. The beauty of the surrounding palm-tree forest is bound to impress even the most seasoned traveler. The combination of a stunning beach and a forest so alien to the Mediterranean landscape make your visit so exotic that you will find it hard to forget.

Other beaches worth a visit include **Ammoudara**, **Almyros** – with the Wetlands of the same name being among the most important in Crete– **Istron**, **Agia Fotia**, and **Myrtos**. Also make sure to visit the beaches in **Ermoupoli**, **Karoumes**, and **Zakros**. The locals are more than willing to tip you about the best dipping spots!



If it's wild natural beauty you seek, don't forget to visit the sandy beaches of **Kserokampos**, which are rich in clay, as well as the impressive beaches of **Goudouras**, **Papadiokampos** and **Koufonissi** (Sitia).

Those hankering for unspoilt natural landscape must definitely visit the **island of Chrissi**, also known as **Gaidouronissi**, with its emerald water and white sandy beaches. Last but not least, Elounda is a beach for the jet set, offering lavish accommodation, sandy beaches and clear blue waters.





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