

PARSIFAL  
YACHTING

# CRETE

itinerary



## Crete

Crete is a magical tapestry of splendid beaches, ancient treasures, and landscapes encompassing vibrant cities and dreamy villages, where locals share their traditions, wonderful cuisine and generous spirit.



## Chania

The west of Crete stands apart in so many ways. A land of giant mountains, grandiose legends and memorials to great battles past, it is presided over by the romantic port city of Hania, once Venice's jewel of a capital and now filled with arty hotels, interesting shops and some of Greece's best eateries. The region also boasts the grandest gorge in Europe, west coast beaches that are among the most beautiful in the world, Europe's southernmost possession (tranquil Gavdos, a remote island nearer to Africa than Greece), and mountain villages hardly affected by modernity. The steep mountains that ripple across the west and into the southern sea guarantee that the region generally remains untouched by the excesses of tourism. From the olive oil to moustachioed elders, if you want to see beautiful and traditional Crete, Hania and the west is definitely the place.



## Heraklion

Iraklio is Crete's most dynamic region, home to almost half the island's population and its top-rated tourist site, the Minoan Palace of Knossos. Priceless treasures unearthed here, and at the many other Minoan sites around Crete, have catapulted the archaeological museum in the capital city of Iraklio onto the world stage.

Admittedly, the coastal stretch east of Iraklio is one continuous band of hotels and resorts. But a few kilometres inland, villages sweetly lost in time provide pleasing contrast. Taste the increasingly sophisticated tippie produced in the Iraklio Wine Country, walk in the footsteps of painter El Greco and writer Nikos Kazantzakis, and revel in the rustic grandeur of remote mountain villages such as Zaros.

On the quieter southern coast, the ex-hippie hang-out of Matala is the only developed resort, while in the charming villages the laid-back life unfolds much the way it has since time immemorial.



## Rethymno

Basking between the commanding bastions of its 15th-century fortress and the glittering azure waters of the Mediterranean, Rethymno (reth-im-no) is one of Crete's most enchanting towns. Its Venetian-Ottoman quarter is a lyrical maze of lanes draped in floral canopies and punctuated with graceful balconied houses, ornate monuments and minarets that add an exotic flourish. But Rethymno is more than its history; thanks largely to a sizeable student population, it has a lively nightlife, excellent restaurants and a hopping, stylish shopping district. There's also a worthwhile, sandy beach right in town. The busier beaches, with their requisite resorts, are all outside of town, along a nearly uninterrupted stretch all the way to Panormo, some 22km away.



# Agios Nikolaos

Tumbling down the hillside to the shores of the glittering bay of Mirabello, Agios Nikolaos (ah-ye-os nih-ko-laos), Lasithi's capital, caters to an international cast of visitors and welcomes them with typical *filoxenia* (hospitality). Its streets are a colourful blend of bars, traditional tavernas and upscale clothes shops, counterbalanced with fish markets and earthy *kateneia* (coffee houses). By night it really comes into its own when the harbour is lit by the lights of effervescent bars, and the adjoining bottle-green lagoon of Voulismeni Lake is even more beguiling. Cosmetically, like many Cretan towns, Agios Nikolaos' architecture may lack the neoclassical grace of the Dodecanese and the sugar cube simplicity of the Cyclades, but it's stylish nonetheless, teeming with chic boutiques hawking jewellery, sea sponges and the usual offering of carved olive wood artefacts and busts of Achilles.

Stroll the harbour front alongside a young crowd of Greek fashionistas, park yourself at a cafe and listen to the buzz of conversation, or head to one of a handful of neighboring beaches. And for all the glitz there's a surprising amount of affordable accommodation, while tavernas and restaurants offer great-value Cretan specialities to wider Mediterranean-influenced cuisine. There's also free wi-fi in the harbour area and its surrounds.



## Knossos

Crete's most famous historical attraction is the Palace of Knossos (k-nos-os ), the grand capital of Minoan Crete, located 5km south of Iraklio. The setting is evocative and the ruins and re-creations impressive, incorporating an immense palace, courtyards, private apartments, baths, lively frescoes and more. Excavation of the site started in 1878 with Cretan archaeologist Minos Kalokerinos, and continued from 1900 to 1930 with British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans who controversially restored parts of the site.



## Elafonissi

Elafonisi is an island located close to the southwestern corner of the Mediterranean island of Crete, of which it is administratively a part, in the regional unit of Chania. When the weather is fine it is possible to walk to the island through the shallow water. The island is a protected nature reserve.





## Balos

Balos is famous for its turquoise waters, the wild natural beauty and the beautiful exotic scenery. It is located approximately 56km northwest of Chania and it's formed between the Cape Gramvousa and the small Cape Tigani and below the range of Platiskinos. Balos is surely the mostly photographed beach in Crete, a very favorite subject of all tourist guides for Greece. It is no coincidence that Prince Charles and Princess Diana visited Balos with their private yacht many years ago.



## Island of Spinalonga

The island of Spinalonga, officially known as Kalydon, is located in the Gulf of Elounda in north-eastern Crete, in Lasithi, next to the town of Plaka. The island is further assigned to the area of Kalydon. It is near the Spinalonga peninsula ("large Spinalonga") – which often causes confusion as the same name is used for both. The official Greek name of the island today is Kalydon.

Originally, Spinalonga was not an island – it was part of the island of Crete. During Venetian occupation the island was carved out of the coast for defense purposes and a fort was built there. (citation needed). During Venetian rule, salt was harvested from salt pans around the island. (citation needed) The island has also been used as a leper colony.



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