

Iraklio Ηρακλειο



Iraklio is Crete's most brash and dynamic region, home to almost half the island's population, the bulk of its commercial and agricultural activity and Crete's most important and fascinating archaeological sites. The island's rich and unique cultural heritage comes alive when traipsing through the Minoan palaces of Knossos, Phaestos, Agia Triada, Gortyna and Malia. The many treasures unearthed at these sites are in the exceptional collection of the archaeological museum in the city of Iraklio – the island's capital and usual port of entry.

However, Iraklio is a diverse region that embodies some of the best and worst of Crete. Sadly, much of the northern coast has surrendered to tourism, with endless hotels lining the beaches. The overdeveloped resorts of Malia and Hersonisos are the island's contribution to the party scene, though they are struggling to deal with the less savoury elements of this type of tourism. Amongst it all, the north is also home to some exclusive resorts, Crete's only international standard golf course and a new aquarium.

But venturing away from the north coast, you enter the region's rural heart and the centre of the island's wine industry, which is becoming more sophisticated and visitor-friendly. Exploring traditional inland villages you can get a glimpse of the old Crete, while in Arhanes, you will see a thriving modern village. The region's natural beauty can be enjoyed in villages such as Zaros, where you can walk the Rouvas Gorge and visit lovely monasteries in the mountains. The southern mountains are popular climbing country.

In the quieter and less accessible southern coast, the ex-hippy hangout of Matala is the only really developed resort. For a more tranquil experience, you can escape to quieter beaches at Kastri and Keratokambos or for total isolation, a dramatic mountain drive leads to the laid-back community of Lendas and the remote surrounding beaches.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the ruins of the Minoan civilisation at **Knossos** (p158), **Phaestos** (p169) and **Malia** (p178)
- Indulging in the lively nightlife and café scene of the island's capital, **Iraklio** (p156)
- Viewing the extraordinary collection of Iraklio's **archaeological museum** (p149)
- Unwinding on the lovely beaches of **Matala** (p172) and **Lendas** (p176) on the south coast
- Enjoying the cool mountain air and monasteries of **Zaros** (p166)



IRAKLIO ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ

pop 137,390

Bustling Iraklio (also called Heraklion) can be a shock to the senses when you first arrive with a Greek island holiday in mind. Crete's hectic, noisy and traffic-ridden capital is a sprawling modern metropolis of concrete apartment blocks that lacks the architectural charms of Rethymno and Hania.

Yet Greece's fifth-largest city has undergone a significant makeover in recent years and is experiencing a period of urban renewal. The waterfront redevelopment has made a marked difference and the city's historic centre has been turned into pleasant pedestrian precinct where its historic monuments are brought to the fore.

The archaeological museum in Iraklio and the palace at Knossos are a window into Minoan culture, but Iraklio abounds in other reminders of its turbulent history. The 14th-century Venetian walls and fortress underscore the importance of Iraklio (then called Candia) to the Venetians, and many monuments date from Venetian occupation, notably the Morosini Fountain, the Venetian Loggia and Agios Markos Basilica.

Iraklio has a certain urban sophistication, with a thriving café and restaurant scene, the island's best shopping and lively nightlife. It can grow on you if you take the time to explore its nuances, but people wanting to a relaxing holiday tend to stay long enough for an obligatory visit to the museum and Knossos, before escaping to more immediately inviting parts of the island.

HISTORY

Iraklio is believed to have been settled since the Neolithic age. Little is known about the intervening years, but in AD 824 Iraklio was conquered by the Saracens and became known as Rabbh el Khandak (Castle of the Ditch), after the moat that surrounded their fortified town. It was reputedly the slave-trade capital of the eastern Mediterranean and the launching pad for the region's notorious pirates.

Byzantine troops finally ousted the Arabs after a siege, in AD 961, that lasted almost a year. The Byzantine leader Nikiforos Fokas made a lasting impression upon the Arabs by chopping off the heads of his prisoners and throwing them over the fortress walls.

The city became known as Handakas until Crete was sold to the Venetians in 1204 and they named it Candia. The Venetians built magnificent public buildings and churches, and barricaded themselves inside the fortress when necessary to protect themselves against a rebellious populace.

Under the Venetians, Candia became a centre for the arts and home to painters such as Damaskinos and El Greco. When the Turks captured Constantinople, the walls of Candia's fortress were extended in anticipation of the growing Turkish menace. Although the Turks quickly overran the island in 1648, it took them 21 years to penetrate the walls of Candia.

Other European countries sent defenders and supplies from time to time, but it was mainly the strength of the walls that kept the Turks at bay. The Turks finally resorted to bribing a Venetian colonel to reveal the wall's weak points and thus were able to capture Candia in 1669. Casualties were high on both sides; the Venetian defenders lost 30,000 men and the Turks lost 118,000.

Under the Turks the city became known as Megalo Kastro (Big Castle) and a cloud of darkness descended. Artistic life withered and many Cretans fled or were massacred.

In August 1898, a Turkish mob massacred hundreds of Cretans, 17 British soldiers and the British Consul. Within weeks, a squadron of British ships steamed into Iraklio's harbour and ended Turkish rule.

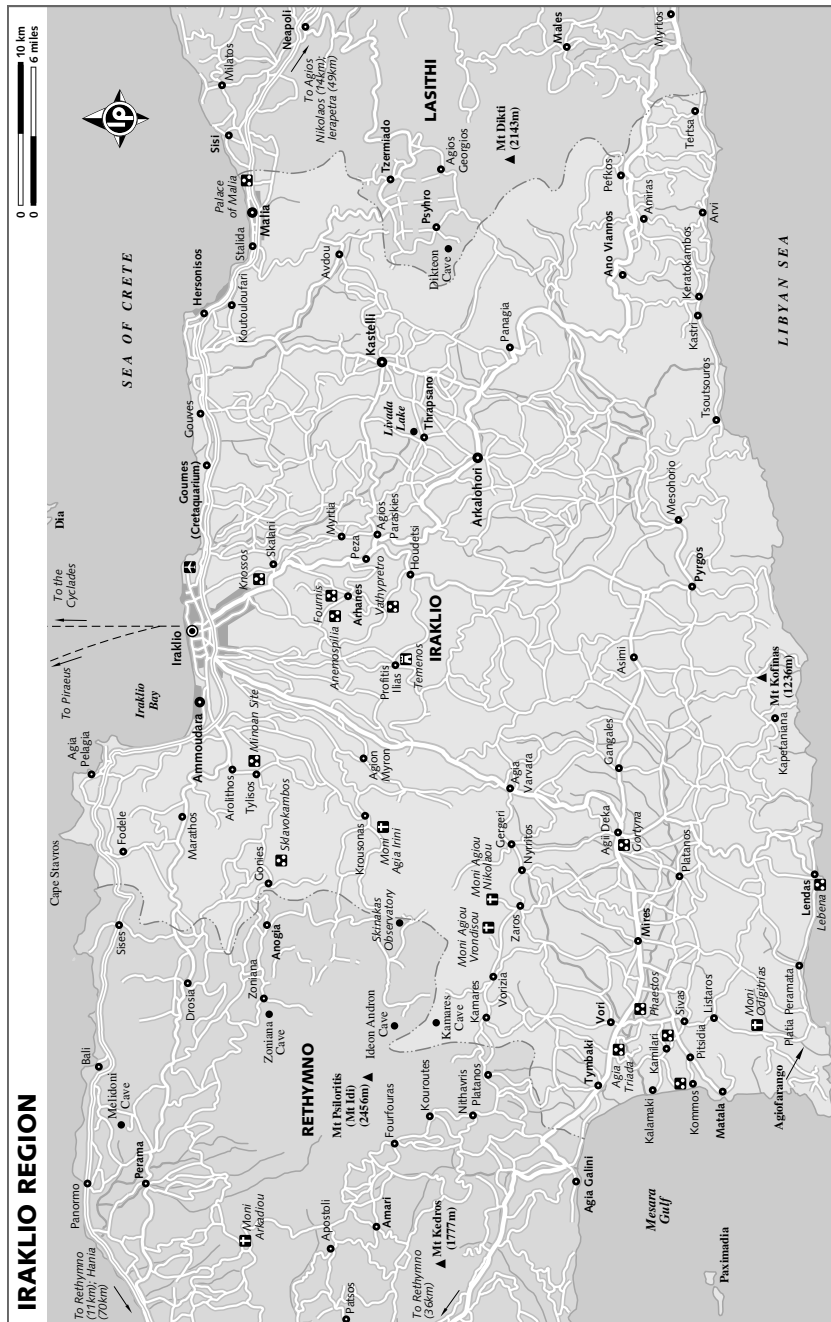
Hania became the capital of independent Crete at the end of Turkish rule, but Candia's central location soon saw it emerge as the commercial centre. It was renamed Iraklio and resumed its position as the island's capital in 1971.

The city suffered badly in WWII, when most of the old Venetian and Turkish town was destroyed by bombing.

ORIENTATION

Iraklio's has two main squares. Plateia Venizelou, better known as the Lion Square because of its landmark Morosini Fountain, is in the heart of the city, while the sprawling Plateia Eleftherias is towards the harbour. The pedestrian streets leading off the fountain are the hub of the city's lively café and dining scene.

Iraklio has two intercity bus stations (see p158). The ferry port is 500m to the east of the old port. The airport is about 5km east of the centre.



INFORMATION

Bookshops

Newsstand (☎ 2810 220 135; Plateia Venizelou) Foreign press and magazines, guidebooks, maps and books on Crete.

Planet International Bookshop (☎ 2810 289 605; Handakos 73) Excellent selection of literature, history and travel books.

Road Editions (☎ 2810 344 610; Handakos 29) A specialist travel bookshop with a great selection of maps and guidebooks.

Emergency

Tourist police (☎ 2810 210 171; Dikeosynis 10; ☎ 7am-10pm)

Internet Access

In Spot Internet Cafe (☎ 2810 300 225; Korai 6; per hr €2.40, midnight-noon €1.20; ☎ 24hr) High-speed access, printers, burners and games.

Netcafe (1878 4; per hr €1.50; ☎ 10am-2am) Has full services.

Sportcafe (cnr 25 Avgoustou & Zotou; per hr €1; ☎ 24hr) Dimly lit, smoky and packed with gamers.

Internet Resources

www.heraklion-city.gr The municipality site

Laundry

Most laundries charge from €6 for a wash and dry.

Inter Laundry (☎ 2810 343 660; Mirabelou 25; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat)

Laundry Perfect (☎ 2810 220 969; Idomeneos & Malikouti 32; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat)

Wash Centre (☎ 2810 242 766; Epimenidou 38; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat)

Left Luggage

Bus Station A (☎ 2810 246 538; per day €2; ☎ 6.30am-8pm)

Iraklio Airport Luggage Service (☎ 2810 397 349; from €2.50-5; ☎ 24hr) Near the local bus stop.

Laundry Washalon (☎ 2810 280 858; Handakos 18; per day €3)

Medical Services

Apollonia Hospital (☎ 2810 229 713; Mousourou) Inside the old walls.

University Hospital (☎ 2810 392 111) At Voutes, 5km south of Iraklio, it's the city's best equipped medical facility.

Money

Most banks are on 25 Avgoustou.

National Bank of Greece (25 Avgoustou 35) Has a 24-hour exchange machine.

Post

Post office (☎ 2810 289 995; Plateia Daskalogianni; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist Information

EOT (Greek National Tourism Organisation; ☎ 2810 246 299; Xanthoudidou 1; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar) Has brochures and maps if you are lucky; opposite the archaeological museum. There is also a tourist information office inside Bus Station A.

Travel Agencies

Skoutelis Travel (☎ 2810 280 808; www.skoutelis-travel.gr; 25 Avgoustou 24) Helpful agent, makes airline and ferry bookings, arranges excursions, accommodation and car hire and has useful ferry information online.

SIGHTS

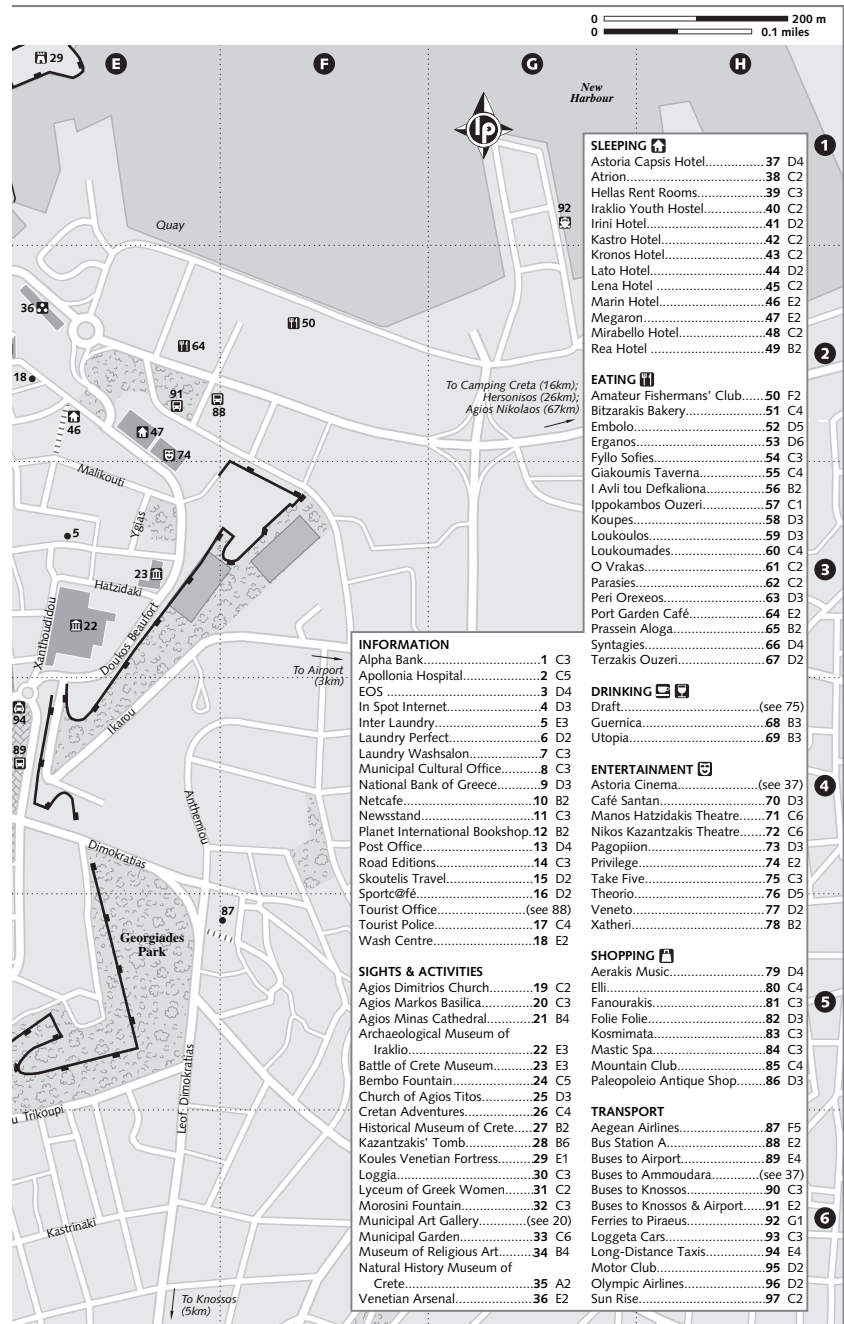
Archaeological Museum of Iraklio

This outstanding museum (☎ 2810 279 000; Xanthoudidou 2 (temp entry from Hatzidakis); admission €4, incl Knossos €10; ☎ 1-7.30pm Mon, 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct; 8am-3pm Tue-Sun, noon-3pm Mon late Oct-early Apr) is second in size and importance only to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens because of its unique and extensive Minoan collection. The museum was undergoing a major €21 million restoration, with the revamped museum expected to open in 2009. In the meantime, highlights of the collection are on display in a compact temporary exhibition being housed in another annexe on the site.

The collection covers Cretan civilization from Neolithic times until the Roman empire and includes pottery, jewellery, figurines and sarcophagi, as well as some famous frescoes, mostly from Knossos and Agia Triada. All testify to the remarkable imagination and

HERCULEAN CITY

After King Minos' wife, Pasiphae, gave birth to the Minotaur, her lover (the bull) went wild and laid waste to the Cretan countryside. Fortunately, help was at hand in the form of iron-man Hercules (Heracles), the man who killed a lion with his bare hands. His voyage to Crete to kill the bull was the seventh of his 12 mighty labours. As the monstrous animal belched flames and fumes, Hercules captured it single-handedly and took it away. The ancient Cretans were so grateful that they named Minos' port city after their superman.



0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

SLEEPING 🛏

Astoria Capsis Hotel.....	37	D4
Atrion.....	38	C2
Hellas Rent Rooms.....	39	C3
Iraklio Youth Hostel.....	40	C2
Irini Hotel.....	41	D2
Kastro Hotel.....	42	C2
Kronos Hotel.....	43	C2
Lato Hotel.....	44	D2
Lena Hotel.....	45	E2
Marin Hotel.....	46	E2
Megaron.....	47	E2
Mirabello Hotel.....	48	C2
Rea Hotel.....	49	B2

EATING 🍴

Amateur Fishermen's Club.....	50	F2
Bitzarakis Bakery.....	51	C4
Embolo.....	52	D5
Erganos.....	53	D6
Fyllo Sofles.....	54	C3
Giakoumis Taverna.....	55	C4
I Avli tou Deftaliona.....	56	B2
Ippokambos Ouzeri.....	57	C1
Koupes.....	58	D3
Loukoulos.....	59	D3
Loukoumades.....	60	C4
O Vrakas.....	61	C2
Parasies.....	62	C2
Peri Oreveos.....	63	D3
Port Garden Café.....	64	E2
Prassein Aloga.....	65	B2
Syntagies.....	66	D4
Terzakis Ouzeri.....	67	D2

DRINKING 🍷

Draft.....	(see 75)	
Guernica.....	68	B3
Utopia.....	69	B3

ENTERTAINMENT 🎬

Astoria Cinema.....	(see 37)	
Café Santan.....	70	D3
Manos Hatzidakis Theatre.....	71	C6
Nikos Kazantzakis Theatre.....	72	C6
Pagopion.....	73	D3
Privilege.....	74	E2
Take Five.....	75	C3
Theorio.....	76	D5
Veneto.....	77	D2
Xatheri.....	78	B2

INFORMATION ℹ

Alpha Bank.....	1	C3
Apollonia Hospital.....	2	C5
EOS.....	3	D4
In Spot Internet.....	4	D3
Inter Laundry.....	5	E3
Laundry Perfect.....	6	D2
Laundry Washalon.....	7	C3
Municipal Cultural Office.....	8	C3
National Bank of Greece.....	9	D3
Netcafe.....	10	B2
Newsstand.....	11	C3
Planet International Bookshop.....	12	B2
Post Office.....	13	D4
Road Editions.....	14	C3
Skoutelis Travel.....	15	D2
Sport@fé.....	16	D2
Tourist Office.....	(see 88)	
Tourist Police.....	17	C4
Wash Centre.....	18	E2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES 🏛

Agios Dimitrios Church.....	19	C2
Agios Markos Basilica.....	20	C3
Agios Minas Cathedral.....	21	B4
Archaeological Museum of Iraklio.....	22	E3
Battle of Crete Museum.....	23	E3
Bembo Fountain.....	24	C5
Church of Agios Titos.....	25	D3
Cretan Adventures.....	26	C4
Historical Museum of Crete.....	27	B2
Kazantzakis' Tomb.....	28	B6
Koules Venetian Fortress.....	29	E1
Loggia.....	30	C3
Lyceum of Greek Women.....	31	C2
Morosini Fountain.....	32	C3
Municipal Art Gallery.....	(see 20)	
Municipal Garden.....	33	C6
Museum of Religious Art.....	34	B4
Natural History Museum of Crete.....	35	A2
Venetian Arsenal.....	36	E2

SHOPPING 🛍

Aerakis Music.....	79	D4
Elli.....	80	C4
Fanourakis.....	81	C3
Folie Folie.....	82	D3
Kosmimata.....	83	C3
Mastic Spa.....	84	C3
Mountain Club.....	85	C4
Paleopoleio Antique Shop.....	86	D3

TRANSPORT 🚗

Aegean Airlines.....	87	F5
Bus Station A.....	88	E2
Buses to Airport.....	89	E4
Buses to Ammoudara.....	(see 37)	
Buses to Knossos.....	90	C3
Buses to Knossos & Airport.....	91	E2
Ferries to Piraeus.....	92	G1
Loggeta Cars.....	93	C3
Long-Distance Taxis.....	94	E4
Motor Club.....	95	D2
Olympic Airlines.....	96	D2
Sun Rise.....	97	C2

advanced skills of the Minoans. While the temporary exhibition only includes 400 of the 15,000 artefacts that had been on display in the museum, it is presented to international museum standards and comprises the key masterpieces of the collection. Among the highlights are the famous Minoan frescoes from Knossos, including the **Procession fresco**, the **Griffin Fresco** (from the Throne Room), the **Dolphin Fresco** (from the Queen's Room) and the amazing **Bull-Leaping Fresco**, which depicts a seemingly double-jointed acrobat somersaulting on the back of a charging bull.

Other frescoes include the lovely, recently restored **Prince of the Lilies**, as well as two frescoes from the new Palace period – the priestess archaeologists have dubbed **La Parisienne** and the **Saffron Gatherer**.

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

From the Middle Minoan period, the most striking piece is the 20cm black stone **Bull's Head**, a libation vessel, with a fine head of curls, gold horns and lifelike painted crystal eyes. Other fascinating exhibits from this period include the tiny, glazed colour reliefs of Minoan houses from Knossos, called the **town mosaic**.

Finds from a shrine at Knossos include figurines of a bare-breasted **snake goddess**.

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

The prized find from Phaestos is the fascinating **Phaestos Disk**, a 16cm circular clay tablet inscribed with pictographic symbols that have never been deciphered.

Examples of the famous elaborate **Kamare pottery**, named after the sacred cave of Kamare where the vases were first discovered, include a superbly decorated vase from Phaestos with white sculpted flowers.

Finds from the palace at Zakros include the gorgeous **crystal rhyton** vase that was found in over 300 pieces and painstakingly put back together again, as well as vessels decorated with floral and marine designs.

The spectacular Minoan **sarcophagus from Agia Triada**, a stone coffin painted with floral and abstract designs and ritual scenes, is regarded as one of the supreme examples of Minoan art.

Other significant pieces from Agia Triada include three celebrated vases. The **Harvester Vase** – of which only the top part remains – depicts a light-hearted scene of young farm workers returning from olive picking. The **Boxer Vase** shows Minoans indulging in two of their favourite pastimes – wrestling and bull-grappling. The **Chieftain Cup** depicts a more cryptic scene: a chief holding a staff and three men carrying animal skins.

Finds from Minoan cemeteries include two small clay models of groups of figures that were found in a *tholos* tomb. One depicts four male dancers in a circle, their arms around each other's shoulders. The dancers may have been participating in a funeral ritual. The other shows two groups of three figures in a room flanked by two columns, with two large seated figures being offered libations by a smaller figure. It is not known whether the large figures represent gods or departed mortals.

Another highlight providing an insight into Minoan life is the elaborate **gaming board** decorated with ivory, crystal, glass, gold and silver, from the New Palace period at Knossos.

Historical Museum of Crete

A fascinating collection from Crete's more recent past is presented at the excellent **Historical Museum** (☎ 2810 283 219; www.historical-museum.gr; Sofokli Venizelou; admission €5; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, summer; 9am–3pm Mon–Sat winter). The ground floor covers the period from Byzantine to Turkish rule, displaying plans, charts, photographs, ceramics and maps. On the 1st floor are the only two El Greco paintings in Crete – *View of Mt Sinai and the Monastery of St Catherine* (1570) and the tiny recent addition, *Baptism of Christ*. Other rooms contain fragments of 13th- and 14th-century frescoes, coins, jewellery, liturgical ornaments and vestments, and medieval pottery.

The 2nd floor has a reconstruction of the **library of author Nikos Kazantzakis**. Another room is devoted to Rethymno-born former prime minister Emmanouil Tsouderos. Some dramatic photographs of a ruined Iraklio are displayed in the **Battle of Crete** section, which was being revamped. There is an outstanding **folklore collection** on the third floor.

Natural History Museum of Crete

Established by the University of Crete, this leading **Natural History Museum** (☎ 2810 282 740;

www.nhmc.uoc.gr; Leaf Venizelou; adult €3, adults accompanying children free; ☎ 10am–2pm Mon–Sat, 10am–7pm Sun) has relocated to impressive new five-level premises in the restored former electricity building on the waterfront. Only two wings had opened at the time of research, including an impressive interactive discovery centre for kids, compete with labs and excavation projects. Apart from the broader evolution of humankind, the museum explores the flora and fauna of Crete, the island's ecosystem and habitats, and its caves, coastline and mountains. It also looks at the Minoan environment, including a reconstruction of a Minoan cottage and its inhabitants. It's a pleasant 10-minute walk along the coast.

Other Attractions

Iraklio burst out of its **city walls** long ago, but these massive Venetian fortifications, with seven bastions and four gates, are still very conspicuous, dwarfing the concrete structures of the 20th century.

The 16th-century **Koules Venetian fortress** (Iraklio Harbour; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Tue–Sun) stands at the end of the Old Harbour jetty (though it was sinking and underwent significant restoration recently). Built by the Venetians who called it Rocca al Mare, it stopped the Turks for 22 years and then became a Turkish prison for Cretan rebels. The impressive exterior has reliefs of the Lion of St Mark. The interior has 26 overly restored rooms and good views from the top. The rooms on the ground level are used for art exhibitions, while music and theatrical events are held in the upper level. The vaulted arcades of the **Venetian Arsenal** are located on the harbour front, opposite the fortress.

Several other notable vestiges from Venetian times survive. Most famous is **Morosini Fountain** on Plateia Venizelou, which spurts water from four lions into eight ornate U-shaped marble troughs. The fountain, built in 1628, was commissioned by Francesco Morosini while he was governor of Crete. A marble statue of Poseidon with his trident used to stand at the centre, but was destroyed during the Turkish occupation. Opposite is the three-aisled 13th-century **Agios Markos Basilica**, reconstructed many times and is now the **Municipal Art Gallery** (☎ 2810 399 228; 25 Avgoustou; admission free; ☎ 9am–1.30pm & 6–9pm Mon–Fri; 9am–1pm Sat). A little north of here is the attractively reconstructed 17th-century **Loggia**, a Venetian

version of a gentleman's club, where the male aristocracy came to drink and gossip. It is now the town hall.

The delightful **Bembo Fountain**, at the southern end of 1866, is shown on local maps as the Turkish Fountain, but it was actually built by the Venetians in the 16th century. It was constructed from a hotchpotch of building materials including an ancient statue. The ornate hexagonal edifice next to the fountain was a pump house added by the Turks, and now functions as a pleasant *kafeneio* (coffee house).

The **Museum of Religious Art** (☎ 2810 288 825; Monis Odigitrias; admission €2; ☎ 9.30am–7.30pm Mon–Sat Apr–Oct; 9.30am–3.30pm winter) is housed in the former Church of Agia Ekaterini, next to **Agios Minas Cathedral**. It has an impressive collection of icons, frescoes and elaborate ecclesiastical vestments. The premier exhibits are the six icons painted by Mihail Damaskinos, El Greco's mentor.

The **Church of Agios Titos** (Agio Titou) was constructed after the liberation of the Crete in AD 961 and was converted to a Catholic church and then a mosque. Twice rebuilt after being destroyed by the big fire in 1554 and then the 1856 earthquake, it has been an Orthodox Church since 1925.

You can pay homage to Crete's most acclaimed contemporary writer, Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957; see p53), by visiting his **tomb** at the Martinengo Bastion (the largest and best preserved bastion) in the southern part of town. The epitaph on his grave, 'I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free', is taken from one of his works. You can actually walk along the **city walls** all the way to the waterfront from here (about an hour), or you can climb up from the steps next to the arches at Plateia Kyprou.

The **Battle of Crete Museum** (☎ 2810 346 554; cr Doukos Beaufort & Hatzidakis; admission free; ☎ 8am–3pm) chronicles this historic battle through photographs, letters, uniforms and weapons.

The quaint **Lyceum of Greek Women** (☎ 2810 286 594; www.leher.gr; Monis Agarathou 9; admission free; ☎ 10.30am–12.30pm Mon–Fri) has a fine collection of Cretan costumes, weavings and other handicrafts.

IRAKLIO FOR CHILDREN

The **Natural History Museum of Crete** (opposite) is a safe bet for kids, as is an excursion to the **Cretaquarium** (see p161). If the children

are museumed out, the waterfront **Port Garden Cafe** (☎ 2810 242 411; Paralialiaki Leoforo; ☎ 7am-late) has indoor and shaded outdoor play areas, including jumping castles and swings. You can also escape the heat and let the kids run around in **Georgiades Park**, where there is a pleasant shady café.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking

Cretan Adventures (☎ 2810 332 772; www.cretanadventures.gr; Evans 10, upstairs) is a well-regarded local company run by two intrepid brothers who can organise hiking tours, mountain biking, and other specialist and extreme activities. The **Mountaineering Club of Iraklio** (E05; ☎ 2810 227 609; www.cretanland.gr/orivatikos; Dikeosynis 53, Iraklio; ☎ 8.30pm-10.30pm) arranges excursions across the island most weekends.

Swimming & Diving

For a dive in Crete's clear warm waters try **Diver's Club** (☎ 2810 811755; www.diversclub-crete.gr; Agia Pelagia), about 20km west of Iraklio, for boat and beach dives at various sites. Am-moudara, about 4km west of Iraklio, is the closest beach to the city but you are better off heading further afield to Agia Pelagia in the west, or Koundoura to the east.

TOURS

Iraklio's travel agents run coach tours the length and breadth of Crete. There are also daily cruises to Santorini. Try the helpful **Skoutelis Travel** (☎ 2810 280808; www.skoutelistravel.gr; 25 Avgoustou 24).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Iraklio's **Summer Arts Festival** presents international orchestras and dance troupes as well as local talent. The principal venue for performances is the huge open-air **Nikos Kazantzakis Theatre** (☎ 2810 242 977; Jesus Bastion; box office ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 6.30-9.30pm), near the moat of the Venetian walls, the nearby Manos Hatzidakis theatre and the Koules Venetian fortress (p153). Programmes are posted last-minute on www.heraklion-city.gr or ask at the **municipal cultural office** (☎ 2810 399 211; Androgeiou 2; ☎ 8am-4pm) behind the Youth Centre café.

SLEEPING

Iraklio's central accommodation is weighted towards business travellers, and the few budget hotels are often not enough to cope with the

number of travellers in the high season. Most hotels were upgraded in the lead-up to the 2004 Olympics.

Budget

Camping Creta (☎ 28970 41400; fax 2897 041 792; per tent/person €5.50/4) The nearest camp sites are at Gouves, 16km east of Iraklio. The camping ground is a flat, shadeless area, but there is a sand- and- pebble beach.

Iraklio Youth Hostel (☎ 2810 286 281; heraklioyouthhostel@yahoo.gr; Vyronos 5; dm/d/tr without bathroom €10/25/35) This scruffy, run-down Greek Youth Hostel Organisation establishment is the source of many complaints from travellers. The dorms are as basic as you can get. It's a last-resort option.

Hellas Rent Rooms (☎ 2810 288 851; fax 2810 284 442; Handakos 24; dm/d/tr without bathroom €10.50/30/42) This friendly and relaxed de facto youth hostel has a reception area and rooftop garden bar three flights up. The rooms have fans and a washbasin and the shared bathrooms are basic but clean. All rooms have balconies. You can have breakfast on the terrace from €2.50.

Mirabello Hotel (☎ 2810 285 052; www.mirabello-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 20; s/d without bathroom €35/44, d with bathroom €65; ☎) One of Iraklio's most pleasant budget hotels, the relaxed Mirabello is on a quiet street in the centre. The rooms are immaculate, though some are a little cramped, with TV, phones, balconies and upgraded bathrooms. Some rooms share single-sex bathrooms.

Lena Hotel (☎ 2810 223 280; www.lena-hotel.gr; Lavana 10; s/d without bathroom €35/45, with bathroom €45/60; ☎) On a quiet street, this friendly hotel has 16 comfortable, airy rooms with phone, TV, fans and double-glazed windows. Most have private bathrooms but even the communal bathrooms are pleasant and upgraded.

Rea Hotel (☎ 2810 223 638; www.hotelrea.gr; Kalime-raki 1; d shared/private bathroom €34/44) Popular with backpackers, the family-run Rea has an easy, friendly atmosphere. Rooms all have fans and sinks, although some bathrooms are shared. There's a small, basic communal kitchen and they also have family rooms (€60).

Midrange

Kronos Hotel (☎ 2810 282 240; www.kronoshotel.gr; Sofokli Venizelou 2; s/d €48/60; ☎) This well-maintained older waterfront hotel has comfortable rooms with double-glazed windows

and balconies, phone and TV, and most have a fridge. It is one of the better value two-star hotels in town. Ask for one of the rooms with sea views.

our pick **Kastro Hotel** (☎ 2810 284 185; www.kastro-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 22; s/d/tr incl breakfast from €50/75/90; ☎) A refurbished, modern, cheery hotel in the back streets, the Kastro is an excellent choice. The large rooms have fridges, TV, hairdryers, phones and ISDN internet connectivity.

Marin Hotel (☎ 2810 300 018; www.marinhotel.gr; Doukos Beaufort 12; s €75, d €95-125; ☎) The front rooms of this modern hotel have great views of the harbour and fortress, and some have big balconies. Rooms are attractive and well-appointed and staff are attentive. The price includes breakfast.

Irini Hotel (☎ 2810 229 703; www.irini-hotel.com; Idomeneos 4; s/d incl breakfast €71/100; ☎) Close to the old harbour, Irini is a mid-sized establishment with 59 large, airy rooms with TV, radio and telephone, and plants and flowers on the balconies. You can get a lower rate if you skip breakfast.

Atrion Hotel (☎ 2810 246 000; www.atrion.gr; Hronaki 9; s/d incl breakfast €95/110; ☎) This refurbished hotel is one of the city's more pleasant options. Rooms are tastefully decked out in neutral tones, with TV, fridge, hairdryers and data ports. The top rooms have sea views and small balconies.

Top End

our pick **Lato Hotel** (☎ 2810 228 103; www.lato.gr; Epimenidou 15; s/d/ste €100/127/175; ☎) This friendly boutique hotel overlooking the old and new harbours is one of Iraklio's prime hotels. It has a smart contemporary design and furnishings, and excellent service. Most rooms have spectacular views, especially the spacious suites. There are great views from the rooftop restaurant and bar, while downstairs is the funky new Brilliant (☎ 2810 334 959) gourmet restaurant.

Megaron (☎ 2810 305 300; www.gdmegaron.gr; Doukos Beaufort 9; s/d €190/215, ste from €247; ☎) This once-derelict historic building on the harbour has been stunningly transformed with top design and fittings throughout. There are comfortable beds, jacuzzis in the VIP suites, plasma-screen TVs and a fax in every room. The rooftop restaurant and bar have fine harbour views and there's a unique glass-sided pool.

EATING

Iraklio has restaurants to suit all tastes and pockets, from excellent fish tavernas to exotic international cuisine and formal dining options. You'll find the all-night souvlaki joints around the Lion Fountain and a few atmospheric tavernas around the market, as well as on the waterfront. Note that the majority of restaurants are closed on Sunday.

Budget

Giakoumis Taverna (☎ 2810 280 277; Theodosaki 5-8; mayirefta €4-6) This is one of our favourites among the tavernas clustered around the 1866 market side streets. There's a full menu of Cretan specialities and vegetarian options. Turnover is heavy, which means that the dishes are fresh, and you can see the meat being prepared for the grill.

O Vrakas (☎ 6977 893973; Plateia 18 Anglon; seafood mezedes €4.20-12) This small street-side *ouzerie* (serving ouzo and light snacks) grills fresh fish al fresco in front of diners. It's unassuming and the menu is limited, but still very popular with locals. Grilled octopus with ouzo is a good choice.

Ippokambos Ouzeri (☎ 2810 280 240; Sofokli Venizelou 3; mezedes €4.50-9.50) Many locals come to this classic Iraklio haunt at the edge of the tourist-driven waterfront dining strip. Take a peek inside at the fresh trays and pots of *mayirefta* such as baked cuttlefish, and dine at one of the sidewalk tables or on the promenade across the road.

Fyllo...Sofies (☎ 2810 284 774; Plateia Venizelou 33; bougatsa €2.20; ☎ 5am-late) Next to the Lion Fountain, this place does a roaring morning trade when both the tourists off the early boats and the post-club crowd head straight for a delicious *bougatsa* pastry. Try the custard version or the less sweet *myzithra* cheese sprinkled with sugar.

Bitzarakis Bakery (☎ 2810 287 465; 1821 7) Sells excellent freshly baked *kalitsounia* (lightly fried pastries) along with many other delectable snacks, sweets and traditional Cretan products made by the Kroussonas women's cooperative (see boxed text, p163).

Loukoumades (☎ 2810 285 567; 1821 9; six pieces €2; ☎ 5am-10pm Mon-Sat) Delicious fluffy *loukoumades* (fritters) drizzled with honey, sesame seeds and cinnamon.

Midrange

Koupes (☎ 6977 259038; Agiou Titou 22; mezedes €2.50-6.50) One of a row of *rakadika* (café-style eateries

servicing raki or wine with mezedes) along this pedestrian strip popular with students, this place opposite the school has a good range of mezedes.

Terzakis Ouzeri (☎ 2810 221 444; Marineli 17; mezedes €3.60-10.20) On a small square opposite the Agios Dimitrios church, this excellent *ouzerie* has a good range of mezedes, *mayirefta* and grills. Try the sea urchin salad or, if you are really game to try a local speciality, ask if they keep *ameletita* (unmentionables, fried sheep testicles).

Embolo (☎ 2810 284 244; Miliara 7; mains €4.50-8) Run by former musician Giannis Stavrakakis from Anogia, Embolo dishes up fine Cretan food – excellent grills, *pites* (pies) and large salads – and has occasional live music.

our pick **I Avli tou Defkaliona** (☎ 2810 244 215; Prevelaki 10; mains €6-8.90; ☎ dinner) This popular taverna with traditional wicker chairs, checked tablecloths and plastic grapevines is known for its broad range of mezedes, home-style dishes and quality meat and seafood, as well as its lively atmosphere.

Peri Orexeos (☎ 2810 222 679; Korai 10; mains €7-8) Right on the busy Korai pedestrian strip, this restaurant offers excellent modern Greek food with creative takes such as creamy chicken-filled *kataifi* (angel-hair pastry) with creamy chicken, huge salads and solid Cretan cuisine. There's also a wicked chocolate dessert.

Syntagies (☎ 2810 241 378; Koziri 3; mains €9.50-19) Housed in one of Iraklio's few surviving 1920s neoclassical mansions, this elegant place has original painted ceilings (including damaged sections from WWII) and tables in the flower-filled courtyard garden. It serves well-executed classic Greek/Cretan dishes alongside international cuisine. The *pastрами* pastries are stand-out starters.

Also recommended is **Parasies** (☎ 2810 225 009; Plateia Istorikou Mouseiou) in the corner of the square next to the Historical Museum; for good-value fresh seafood, the **Amateur Fisherman's Club** (☎ 2810 223 812), in a concrete building on the waterfront opposite the bus station; and **Erganos** (☎ 2810 285 629; Georgiadi 5) opposite the Jesus Bastion for reliable Cretan food at decent prices.

Top End

our pick **Prassein Aloga** (☎ 2810 283 429; cnr Handakas & Kydonias 21; mains €12-18) This little rustic-style café/restaurant has excellent innovative Mediterranean food from an ever-changing menu.

It has some dishes based on ancient Greek cuisine, such as pork medallions with dried fruit on wild rice.

Loukoulos (☎ 2810 224 435; Korai 5; mains €15-32) Loukoulos offers luscious Mediterranean specialities served on fine china and accompanied by soft classical music. You can either opt for the elegant interior or take your meal on the outdoor terrace under a lemon tree.

Also recommended is the superb food at Pagopiion (below), before it gets too noisy.

ENTERTAINMENT

When not being used by live performers in the summer (see p154), the Nikos Kazantzakis theatre operates as an **open-air cinema** (☎ 2810 242 977; Jesus Bastion).

Astoria Cinema (☎ 2810 226 191; Plateia Eleftherias) screens the latest movies, mostly in English. A new cinema multiplex and entertainment complex was due to open along the waterfront towards the Natural History Museum.

The best way to find any live Cretan music in town is by asking at the Aerakis Music store (see opposite), spotting posters around town, or trying your luck at **Xatheri** (☎ 2810 332 757; Handakas 36) and **Theorio** (☎ 2810 288 390; Padiados 22) which have regular live music on Friday and Saturday nights (November to May).

Cafés & Bars

Iraklio has an astounding number of cafés and bars, the most concentrated and lively area being the pedestrian strips around Korai and Perdikari. Most morph into lively bars after 11pm. Along Handakas you'll find relaxed and cosy places more suitable for conversation than people-watching.

Pagopiion (☎ 2810 346 028; Plateia Agiou Titou; ☎ 10am-late) This former ice factory with an arty edge is a perennial favourite that becomes a lively bar after 11pm.

Guernica (☎ 2810 282 988; Apokoronou Kritis 2; ☎ 10am-late) A great combination of traditional décor and contemporary music make this one of Iraklio's hippest bar/cafés. The rambling old building has a delightful terrace garden for the summer.

Veneto (☎ 2810 223 686; Epimenidou 9) This café has the best view of the harbour and fortress from its lovely terrace. It's in an historic building near Hotel Lato.

Take Five (☎ 2810 226 564; Arkoleondos 7; ☎ 10am-late) This old favourite on recently pedestrianised El Greco Park has been rather swamped

by louder new arrivals. Next door, Draft (☎ 2810 301 341; Arkoleondos 9) grill and beer house has more than 40 beers, though they don't come cheap (from €5.50).

Utopia (☎ 2810 341 321; Handakas 51) This almost formal old-style café specialises in teas, hot chocolates, fondues and has an assortment of equally wicked icecreams.

Café Santan (☎ 6976 285 869; Korai 13) The city's first oriental café, with *shishas*, sofas and ethnic oriental dance music, including live belly dancers from 11pm.

Nightclubs

Iraklio has the smartest and most sophisticated nightlife on Crete. The clubs are scattered around town, along Leoforos Ikarou, just down from Plateia Eleftherias, and Epimenidou. In summer, the action moves to the clubs by the waterfront, where a new club and entertainment precinct is emerging with open-air clubs. Some venues open around midnight. The cover charge usually starts at about €6 and should include a drink.

Privilege (Doukos Beaufort 7) Iraklio's smart set packs this dance club that can easily hold 1000 people. Like many of Crete's dance clubs, there's international music (rock, techno etc) until about 2am, when Greek club music takes over.

The most popular waterfront club is the pretentious but nonetheless classy **Big Fish** (☎ 2810 288 011; Makariou 17 & Venizelou; ☎ all day), in a stunningly restored old stone building. There is also the club next door, Desire.

SHOPPING

Iraklio has the most extensive and sophisticated shopping on Crete, so it's a good place to pick up the latest fashion, replace a suitcase or shop for luxury goods. Pedestrian Dedalou and Handakas are lined with mostly mainstream shops. The busy narrow market street, 1866, has stalls spilling over with sponges, herbs, fruits, vegetables, T-shirts, nuts, honey, shoes and bags. For leading designers and jewellers, head to Kaloherinou and 1821 where you'll find Greek jewellers like **Fanourakis** (☎ 2810 282 708; Plateia N Foka).

Aerakis Music (☎ 2810 225 758; Daedalou 37; www.seistronmusic.gr) Offers the best range of Cretan music, from old and rare recordings to the latest releases – many on their own record label, Seistron Music.

Paleopoleio Antique Shop (☎ 2810 240 155; Agiou Titou 52) One of the few surviving antique stores in a city obsessed with the latest brand names, this old store has a small assortment of antiques and collectables, icons and old books, the showpiece being an old diver's costume hanging in the window.

Kosmimata (☎ 2810 346 888; Handakas 31) Designer Lily Haniotaki-Besi and her jeweller husband make all of the modern and unique jewellery in this delightful small silver workshop.

Mountain Club (☎ 2810 280 610; Evans 15) If you haven't come prepared for hikes and adventures, you'll find outdoor clothing and footwear as well as camping, climbing and biking gear here.

Folli Folli (☎ 2810 346 354; Daedalou 23) Greece's internationally successful handbag and jewellery chain.

Mastic Spa (☎ 2810 390 567; Kantanoleon 2) Has unique products made from Chios Island mastic, including foodstuffs and skin care.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Nikos Kazantzakis International Airport (code HER; ☎ 2810 228 401)

DOMESTIC

Olympic (☎ city 2810 244 824, airport 2810 337 203; www.olympicairlines.com; 25 Avgoustou 27) and **Aegean** (☎ city 2810 344 324, fax 2810 344 330, ☎ Airport 2810 330 475; www.aegeanair.com; Leaf Dimokratias 11) each have at least five flights daily to Athens (from €85) from Iraklio as well as daily flights to Thessaloniki (from €106). Olympic also flies to Rhodes (from €89). Both airlines have regular special fare deals, although rarely in peak season. Aegean's early bird internet bookings are excellent value but dates cannot be changed. For flying last-minute, Olympic is normally cheaper. **Sky Express** (☎ 2810 223 500; www.skyexpress.gr) has daily flights to Rhodes and several weekly flights to Santorini, Lesvos, Kos, Samos and Ikaria (from €79) on its 18-seater planes.

INTERNATIONAL

Iraklio has charter flights from all over Europe, with flights to London available from €80 to €150. Skoutelis Travel (p154) is a good place to ask. **GB Airways** (www.gbairways.com) also has weekly scheduled flights from Gatwick. Aegean Airlines had direct scheduled flights from Iraklio to Rome, Larnaca, Stuttgart, Dusseldorf and Monaco.

Boat

The **Iraklio Port Authority** (☎ 2810 244 912) at the port has ferry schedule information.

Minoan Lines (☎ 2104 145 700, 2810 229 624; www.minoan.gr) operates ferries between Iraklio and Piraeus (seven hours), departing from both Piraeus and Iraklio at 10pm. Fares start at €29 for deck class and €54 for cabins. The Minoan Lines' high-speed boats, the F/B *Festos Palace* and F/B *Knossos Palace*, are more modern and comfortable than their ANEK rivals.

In summer, Minoan runs extra 6½ hour services (deck class €37) on weekends and some weekdays, departing Iraklio and Piraeus at 11am and arriving at 5.30pm.

GA Ferries (☎ 2810 222 408; www.gafferries.gr) runs four ferries weekly from Iraklio to Thessaloniki (€46.50, 31 hours) via Santorini (€16, 4½ hours), Ios (€18.80, 6½ hours) and Paros (€24.30, 10 hours), stopping at several other islands en route. GA also has a weekly ferry from Iraklio (leaving Friday 5pm) to Rhodes (€26.40, cabin €39.20, 14½ hours) via Kasos (€19.40, six hours) and Karpathos (€17.40, eight hours).

Hellenic Seaways (www.hellenicseaways.gr) has a daily high-speed service to Santorini (€31, 1¾ hours), Ios (€36.70, 2½ hours) Paros (€47.80, 3¼ hours), Naxos (€41.70, 4¼ hours) and Mykonos (€48.70, 4¾ hours).

ANEK Lines (☎ 28102 44912; www.anek.gr) has daily ferries between Iraklio and Piraeus (regular €32, cabin €58, eight hours) at 8.30pm.

LANE Lines (☎ 2810 346 440; www.lane.gr) leaves Iraklio for Sitia, Kasos (€19.50, six hours), Karpathos (€19.50, eight hours), Diafani (€17.90, nine hours), Halki (€18.20, 11 hours) and Rhodes (€27, 14 hours).

BUSES FROM BUS STATION A

Destination	Duration	Fare (€)	Frequency
Hania	3hr	10.50	18 daily
Rethymno	1¾hr	6.50	18 daily
Agia Pelagia	45min	3.10	3 daily
Agios Nikolaos	1½hr	6.20	half-hourly
Arhanes	30min	1.60	hourly
Hersonisos/Malia	45min	3.50	half-hourly
Ierapetra	2½hr	9.50	8 daily
Knossos	20min	1.15	3 hourly
Lasithi Plateau	2hr	4.70	1 daily
Milatos	1½hr	4.70	2 daily
Sitia	3½hr	13.10	5 daily

BUSES FROM BUS STATION B

Destination	Duration	Fare (€)	Frequency
Agia Galini	2hr	7.10	6 daily
Anogia	1hr	3.40	4 daily
Matala	2½hr	6.80	5 daily
Phaestos	1½hr	5.70	8 daily

Bus

Iraklio has two intercity bus stations. **Bus Station A** (☎ 2810 246 534), which serves eastern and western Crete (including Knossos), is on the waterfront near the quay, though there were plans to relocate it. **Bus Station B**, (☎ 2810 255 965) just beyond Hania Gate, west of the centre, serves Phaestos, Agia Galini and Matala.

Services reduce on weekends. Check out www.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr.

Long-Distance Taxi

For destinations around Crete, **Long-Distance Taxis** (☎ 2810 210 102) have cabs at Plateia Eleftherias outside the Astoria Capsis Hotel, and at Bus Station B. Sample fares include Agios Nikolaos (€60), Rethymno (€70) and Hania (€120).

GETTING AROUND

Bus No 1 goes to and from the airport every 15 minutes between 6am and 1am. The bus terminal is near the Astoria Capsis Hotel on Plateia Eleftherias. A taxi to the airport costs around €7 to €10. Try **Ikarus Radio Taxi** (☎ 2810 211 212).

The airport has a full range of car-rental companies including the big multinationals, but you'll get the best deal from local outlets, which are largely located on 25 Avgoustou.

Loggetta Cars (☎ 2810 289 462; www.loggetta.gr; 25 Avgoustou 20)

Motor Club (☎ 2810 222 408; www.motorclub.gr; Plateia 18 Anglon) Opposite the fortress, has the biggest selection of bikes.

Sun Rise (☎ 2810 221 609; 25 Avgoustou 46) Just off pedestrian street.

AROUND IRAKLIO

KNOSSOS ΚΝΩΣΟΣ

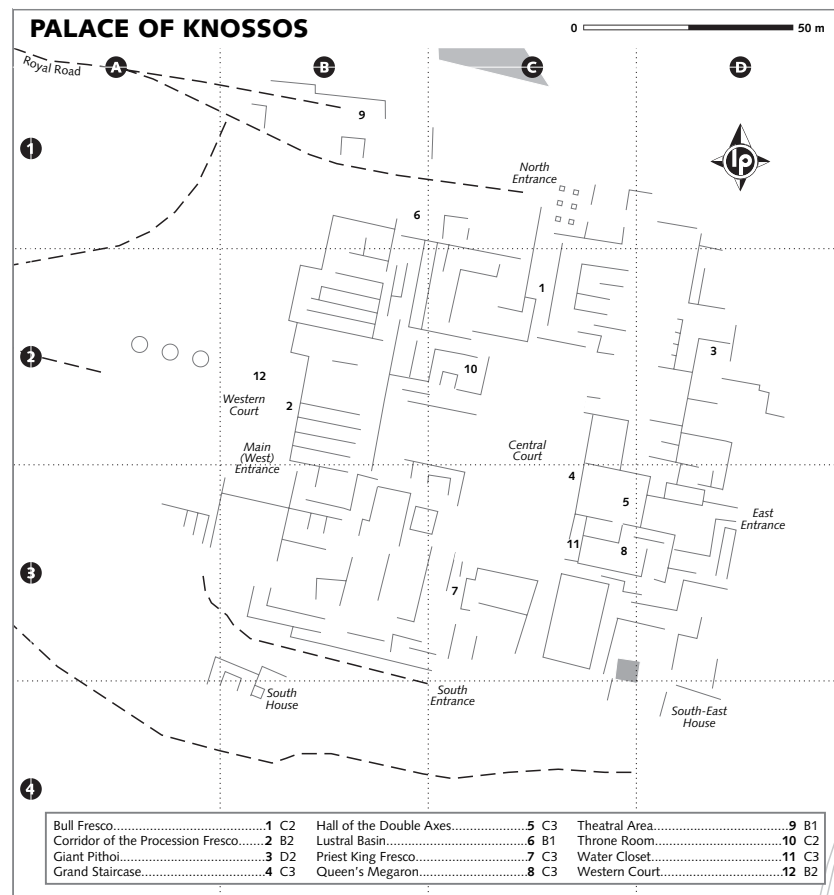
Once the capital of Minoan Crete, **Knossos** (☎ 2810 231 940; admission €6, incl Iraklio Archaeological Museum €10; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-3pm Nov-Mar) is the island's major tourist attraction. The palace site is in an evocative location,

about 5km south of Iraklio, surrounded by green hills and shaded by pine trees, though the road leading up to it is an uninspiring gauntlet of souvenir shops. The ruins of Knossos (k-nos-os) were uncovered in 1900 by the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (p162). Heinrich Schliemann, the legendary discoverer of ancient Troy, had his eye on the spot, believing an ancient city was buried there, but he was unable to strike a deal with the local landowner in Turkish-controlled Crete. Intrigued by Schliemann's discovery of engraved seals in Crete, and later pottery finds in Kamares, Evans sailed to Crete in 1894 and set in train the purchase of a share of the Knossos site, which gave him exclusive rights to the excavation. He returned

five years later and began digging with a group of Cretan workmen.

The first treasure to be unearthed in the flat-topped mound called Kefala was a fresco of a Minoan man, followed by the discovery of the Throne Room. The archaeological world was stunned that a civilisation of this maturity and sophistication had existed in Europe at the same time as the great pharaohs of Egypt. Some even speculated that it was the site of the lost city of Atlantis to which Plato referred to many centuries later, though this is highly disputed.

Evans 'realistic' reconstruction methods continue to be controversial – with both visitors and archaeologists believe Evans got carried away by his own fantasy. Unlike other



THE LABYRINTH

Legend has it that after King Minos failed to sacrifice a magnificent white bull in honour of Poseidon, the god took his revenge by making the king's wife, Pasiphae, fall in love with the beast. To help her lure the bull, Daedalus, chief architect at Knossos and all-round handyman, made her a hollow wooden cow structure in which she could conceal herself. The bull apparently found her irresistible and their bizarre union produced the Minotaur: a hideous half-man, half-bull monster.

King Minos had Daedalus build a labyrinth in which to confine the Minotaur. He enraged the Athenians by demanding that Athens pay an annual tribute of seven youths and seven maidens to feed the monster, to compensate for the Athenians killing Minos' son Androgeos. The Athenian hero Theseus vowed to kill the Minotaur and sailed to Crete posing as one of the sacrificial youths. He fell in love with Ariadne, King Minos' daughter, who promised to help him if he would take her away with him. Ariadne gave him the ball of twine that he unwound on his way into the labyrinth and used to retrace his steps after slaying the monster. They eventually fled Crete together.

archaeological sites in Crete, however, substantial reconstruction helps the visitor to visualise what the palace might have looked like at the peak of its glory.

You will need to spend a few hours at Knossos to explore it thoroughly. There is little signage, so unless you have a travel guide, or hire a guide, you may not appreciate what you are looking at. To beat the crowds and avoid the heat, get there early before the tour buses arrive. The café at the site is expensive – you'd do better to bring a picnic along. Note that you can buy a combined ticket for €10 that also includes entry to the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio.

History

The first palace at Knossos was built around 1900 BC, but most of what you see dates from 1700 BC after the Old Palace was destroyed by an earthquake. It was then rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design. The palace was partially destroyed again sometime between 1500 BC and 1450 BC and inhabited for another 50 years before it was devastated once and for all by fire.

The New Palace was carefully designed to meet the needs of a complex society. There were domestic quarters for the king or queen, residences for officials and priests, homes for common folk and burial grounds. Public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasuries and storerooms were built around a paved courtyard in a design so intricate that it may have been behind the legend of the labyrinth and the Minotaur (see boxed text, above).

It was once possible to enter the royal apartments, but in early 1997 it was decided

to cordon this area off before it disappeared altogether under the continual pounding of feet. Extensive repairs are under way but it is unlikely to open to the public again.

Exploring the Site

The site's numerous rooms, corridors, dog-leg passages, staircases, and nooks and crannies preclude a detailed walk description of the palace. However Knossos is not a site where you'll be perplexed by heaps of rubble. Thanks to Evans' reconstruction, the most significant parts of the complex are instantly recognisable (if not instantly found). While you wander you will come across many of Evans' reconstructed columns. Most are painted deep brown-red with gold-trimmed black capitals. These, like all Minoan columns, taper at the bottom.

Strategically placed copies of Minoan frescoes help infuse the site with the artistic spirit of these remarkable people. The Minoan achievements in plumbing equal their achievements in painting: drains and pipes were carefully placed to avoid flooding, taking advantage of centrifugal force. It appears that at some points water goes uphill, demonstrating a mastery of the principle that water finds its own level. Also notice the placement of light wells and the relationship of rooms to passages, porches, light wells and verandas, which kept rooms cool in summer and warm in winter.

The usual entrance to the palace complex is across the Western Court and along the **Corridor of the Procession Fresco**. The fresco depicted a long line of people carrying gifts to present to the king; only fragments remain. A copy of one of these fragments, called the

Priest King Fresco, can be seen to the south of the Central Court.

An alternative way to enter is to have a look at the Corridor of the Procession Fresco, then walk straight ahead to enter the site from the northern end. If you do this you will come to the **theatrical area**, a series of steps whose function remains unknown. It could have been a theatre where spectators watched acrobatic and dance performances, or the place where people gathered to welcome important visitors arriving by the Royal Road.

The **Royal Road** leads off to the west. The road, Europe's first (Knossos has lots of firsts), was flanked by workshops and the houses of ordinary people. The **Lustral Basin** is also in this area. Evans speculated that this was where the Minoans performed a ritual cleansing with water before religious ceremonies.

Entering the **Central Court** from the north, you will pass the relief **Bull Fresco**, which depicts a charging bull. Relief frescoes were made by moulding wet plaster and then painting it while it was still wet.

Also worth seeking out in the northern section of the palace are the **giant pithoi**, ceramic jars used for storing olive oil, wine and grain. Evans found over 100 of them at Knossos (some were 2m high). Once you have reached the Central Court, which in Minoan times was surrounded by the high walls of the palace, you can begin exploring the most important rooms of the complex.

From the northern end of the west side of the palace, steps lead down to the **Throne Room**. This room is fenced off but you can still get a good view of it. The centrepiece, the simple, beautifully proportioned throne, is flanked by the **Griffin Fresco**. Griffins were mythical beasts regarded as sacred by the Minoans.

The room is thought to have been a shrine, and the throne the seat of a high priestess, rather than a king. Certainly, the room seems to have an aura of mysticism and reverence rather than pomp and ceremony. The Minoans did not worship their deities in great temples but in small shrines, and each palace had several.

On the 1st floor of this side of the palace is the section Evans called the **Piano Nobile**, for he believed the reception and staterooms were here. A room at the northern end of this floor displays copies of some of the frescoes found at Knossos.

Returning to the Central Court, the impressive **grand staircase** leads from the middle of the

eastern side of the palace to the royal apartments, which Evans called the **Domestic Quarter**. This section of the site is now cordoned off. Within the royal apartments is the **Hall of the Double Axes**. This was the king's megaron, a spacious double room in which the ruler both slept and carried out certain court duties. The room had a light well at one end and a balcony at the other to ensure air circulation.

The room takes its name from the double axe marks on its light well. These marks appear in many places at Knossos. The *labrys* (double axe) was a sacred symbol to the Minoans, and the origin of our word 'labyrinth'.

A passage leads from the Hall of the Double Axes to the **queen's megaron**. Above the door is a copy of the **Dolphin Fresco**, one of the most exquisite Minoan artworks. A blue floral design decorates the portal. Next to this room is the queen's bathroom, complete with terracotta bathtub and a **water closet**, touted as the first ever to work on the flush principle; water was poured down by hand.

Getting There & Away

Bus No 2 leaves Bus Station A in Iraklio every 10 minutes for Knossos. From the coastal road there are signs directing you to Knossos. Beware of touts trying to usher you into private paid parking areas. There are several free car parks further along closer to the site.

CRETAQUARIUM

The massive **Cretaquarium** (☎ 2810 337 788; www.cretaquarium.gr; adult/child 4 & over €8/6; 🕒 9am-9pm May-mid-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Oct-Apr) is part of the Thalasosmos marine-science complex established by the Hellenic Centre for Maritime research at the former American base at Gournes, 15km east of Iraklio. It is the largest aquarium in the Eastern Mediterranean region. There are several large tanks with an amazing display of marine life, though it is light on really big fish. There are some interactive multimedia features and displays in several languages. It's right on the beach, so you incorporate a swim.

North coast buses (€1.60, 30 minutes) can drop you on the main road, from there it's a 10-minute walk. The turn-off to Kato Gouves is well signposted on the new national road.

FODELE ΦΟΔΕΛΕ

pop 521

The pretty village of Fodele, 25km west of Iraklio, is famous as the birthplace of El Greco (p49).

While this is disputed, there is a small **museum** (☎ 2810 521 500; admission €2; 🕒 8am-7pm Tue-Sun) dedicated to the great artist in a lovely stone building on the outskirts to the village where he is supposed to have lived as a child. There are a few reproductions of his work but little enlightenment about the man and his life. Opposite the museum, is the cruciform Byzantine domed **Church of the Panayia**, built on the site of an earlier basilica. Unfortunately it is normally closed.

Fodele is nonetheless an attractive village in a fertile and verdant valley with a river running through it and a few Byzantine chapels. Women sit crocheting outside stores selling crafts and souvenirs that line the main street, and there are café tables along the riverbank. Locals come here in winter and spring to eat meat at the tavernas by the river.

AROLITHOS ΑΡΟΛΙΘΟΣ

On the road to Tylisos, 11km southwest of Iraklio, the faux Cretan village of **Arolithos** (*a-ro-li-thos*) has an **agricultural and folklife museum** (☎ 2810 821 050; www.arolithosvillage.gr; adult/child €3/1.50; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun summer; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat winter). Built in the mid-1980s, this family-run stone-built village has pottery, weaving and blacksmiths' workshops, a taverna, *kafeneio*, village shop with local handicrafts and a huge square that regularly hosts real Cretan weddings and baptisms. The three-level

museum has a decent collection of household and agricultural items in themed displays about rural life. There is also comfortable traditional-style **accommodation** (d with breakfast €55).

On the road from Iraklio, you will spot **Koumbedes** taverna, in a restored Ottoman mosque. It has good food and pleasant views over the valley.

TYLISOS ΤΥΛΙΣΟΣ

The **Minoan site** (☎ 2810 831 498; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Mon-Sat) at the small village of Tylisos (*til-is-os*), 13km southwest of Iraklio, is for the insatiable archaeology enthusiast. Amid the village houses, three large villas dating from different periods have been excavated. Buses from Iraklio to Anogia go through Tylisos. They also go past another Minoan site at **Sklavokambos**, 8km closer to Anogia. The ruins date from 1500 BC and were probably the villa of a district governor.

MYRTIA ΜΥΡΤΙΑ

Myrtia, some 15km south of Iraklio, is the ancestral village Crete's most famous writer (see p53) and now home to the **Nikos Kazantzakis Museum** (☎ 2810 742 451; www.kazantzakis-museum.gr; adult/student & child €3/free; 🕒 9am-7pm Mar-Oct, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Feb). The museum has an excellent collection of memorabilia about the author and his works, including movie and theatre posters from his works from around the world.

SIR ARTHUR EVANS & KNOSSOS

Sir Arthur John Evans (1851-1941) was the British scholar who discovered the ruins of the lost palace at Knossos and named the civilisation Minoan after the legendary King Minos. An avid amateur journalist and adventurer, he was curator of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford from 1884 to 1908. His special interest in ancient coins and the writing on stone seals from Crete brought him to the island for the first time in 1894. He had a hunch that the mainland Mycenaean civilisation derived originally from Crete. With the help of the newly formed Cretan Archaeological society, he began negotiating the purchase of the land, eventually securing it in 1900 after Greek laws changed. Digging began and the palace quickly revealed itself.

Evans was so enthralled by his discovery that he spent the next 25 years and £250,000 of his own money excavating and reconstructing sections of the palace, unearthing the remains of a Neolithic civilisation beneath the remains of the Bronze Age Minoan palace. He also discovered some 3000 clay tablets containing Linear A and Linear B script and wrote his own definitive description of his work at Knossos in a four-volume opus called *The Palace of Minos*. Evans received many honours for his work and was knighted in 1911.

Many archaeologists have disparaged Evans' reconstruction, believing he sacrificed accuracy to his overly vivid imagination. Evans maintained that he was obliged to rebuild columns and supports in reinforced concrete or the palace would have collapsed, but many archaeologists feel that the site was irretrievably damaged. Certainly archaeologists today would not be allowed to use so much fanciful conjecture.

DETOUR: KROUSONAS

In the foothills of Mt Psiloritis, the women of the village of Krousouas have created a unique cottage industry making traditional Cretan pastry and local delicacies from their grandmother's recipes. The **Kroussaniotissa Cooperative** (☎ 2810 711 989; 🕒 8am-11pm) has 25 women producing a mouth-watering range of sweet and savoury *kalitsounia* (pastries), almond biscuits, rusks, pasta, *baklava*, *galaktoboureko* (custard pastries) and other sweets. Their specialty is the *kouloura* (ornate bread) for weddings and baptisms that can take two women eight hours to decorate. The cooperative is the biggest business in the village, catering for many weddings and social functions, and exporting all over Greece and as far as Germany.

After stocking up on Cretan treats you can visit the nearby **Moni Agia Irini**. This picturesque monastery dates from the last years of Venetian rule, but was destroyed by the Turks in 1822 and all the monks were killed. Rebuilt in 1940, today it's occupied by nuns.

If you want to stay in this area, a good alternative to Iraklio, an excellent option is the **Viglatoras Traditional Apartments** (☎ 2810 711 332; www.viglatoras.gr) on a farm in the nearby village of Sarhos.

There are two buses daily from Iraklio (€2.20, 30 minutes).

TEMENOS ΤΕΜΕΝΟΣ

Above the village of Profitis Ilias, 24km southeast of Iraklio, the Byzantine castle of Temenos dominates the twin peaks of Roka Hill, whose strategic position overlooking the north coast and the surrounding mountain peaks made it a perfect place for a fortress. Byzantine ruler Nikiforos Fokas built the castle in 961 to protect Iraklio. There are two pathways leading to its ramparts, which are an hour's walk from the top of the village.

Despite its proximity to Iraklio, the agricultural region maintains a traditional character and sees few tourists. The best information on the area is from local nature enthusiast Dimitris Kornaros who runs **Axas Outdoor Activities** (☎ 2810 871 239; axas@yahoo.gr).

In July and August, concerts are held in a unique venue near the nearby village of Kyparissi – a stone-built amphitheatre in the middle of fields known as **Theatro Agron**. Ask around or at Aerakis music store in Iraklio for a program.

This area is best explored by car.

CENTRAL IRAKLIO

Although most travellers zip through the region between Iraklio and the south coast, several sights make it well worth a stop, but you need your own wheels to explore the area.

The main roads leading south from Iraklio pass through a series of bustling commercial

centres and agricultural villages that see very few tourists. Arhanes, with a couple of interesting Minoan sites nearby and excellent tavernas, makes a worthwhile stop and Zaros is a good base to explore the surrounding region.

Peza is the heart of the country's wine production, while the village of Thrapsano makes the giant Minoan-style pottery.

ARHANES ΑΡΧΑΝΕΣ

pop 3824

Arhanes, 14km south of Iraklio, is in the heart of Crete's main wine-producing district. The fertile basin of Arhanes has been settled since the Neolithic period. The ancient Minoans built a grand palace that was an administrative centre for the entire Arhanes basin, but it was destroyed along with the other great Minoan palaces. The town came back to life under the Mycenaeans, flourishing until the Dorian conquest in 1100 BC.

Today Arhanes is a vibrant town with meticulously restored old houses and pleasant squares. It's considered a model of rural town redevelopment and the new road from Iraklio, which makes it an easy commute, is bringing people back to the village.

Irakliots regularly visit to eat at Aharnes' fine tavernas, while locals hang out in the cafés around the main square. There is small but excellent archaeological museum and a few excellent accommodation options in restored old buildings.

Orientation & Information

The village is divided into two, but the interest is in Ano (upper) Arhanes. It's a bit of a maze

getting around the one-ways streets and narrow alleys so it's best to park on the outskirts and follow the signs to the post office. The bus stops at the start of the village and close to the main square. There are several ATMs. You can find accommodation and information at www.archanes.gr.

Sights

Only scraps of the **palace** (signposted from the main road) remain and most of the small sites scattered around town are not open to the public. The small but well-arranged **Archaeological Museum of Arhanes** (☎ 2810 752 712; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-2.30pm Wed-Mon) has several interesting finds from regional excavations. Exhibits include clay *larnakes* (coffins) and musical instruments from Fourni, and an ornamental dagger from the Anemospilia temple (see boxed text, opposite) used for human sacrifice.

The Folk Museum of Arhanes (☎ 2810 752 891; admission €1; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon & Wed-Fri) in a restored stone building, is set up like a traditional home, with a worthy collection of furniture, embroideries and handicrafts and the tools of rural life, including bloomers and kids' toys. It's signposted from the Archaeological museum. On the outskirts of Kato Arhanes the **Cretan Historical and Folk Museum** (☎ 2810 751 853; admission €3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) has an interesting private collection from various periods of Crete's history, including personal effects of the infamous German General Kreipe (see p35).

Sleeping & Eating

Neraidospilios (☎ 2810 752 965; www.neraidospilios.gr; studio & apt €40-70; 🍷 🍷) These superbly appointed and spacious studios and apartments, on the outskirts of the village overlooking the mountains, are run by the brothers at the Diahroniko café. Go there and they will direct you. The pool is an added attraction.

Villa Arhanes (☎ 2810 390 770; www.maris.gr; apt €129-194; 🍷 🍷) This intimate upmarket complex is in a tastefully restored 19th-century Cretan mansion high in the village. Guests can participate in rural work or other seasonal village activity.

Also recommended is the **Arhontiko guest house** (☎ 2810 751 007).

All the tavernas in town have a good reputation. On the square you could try **Likastos** (☎ 2810 752 433) or **To Spitiko** (☎ 2810 751 591),

while **Ambelos** (☎ 2810 751 039), opposite the Agricultural cooperative, is a good choice for local specialties.

It is worth exploring the back streets to find **Fabrica Eleni** (☎ 2810 751 331; www.oilvisit.com), a bar-cum-*rakadiko* housed in a restored olive-oil press, complete with original olive press and mini-museum featuring some of the owner's father's ingenious inventions.

Getting There & Away

There are buses hourly from Iraklio to Arhanes (€1.60, 30 minutes). Drivers should take the more scenic Knossos road which has some interesting detours. There are several roads into the village, the second turn-off leading you close to the main square.

AROUND ARHANES

The round stone 'beehive tombs' at **Fourni**, dating from around 2500 BC, form the most extensive Minoan cemetery on the island. One of the tombs contained the remains of a Minoan noble woman whose jewellery is on display in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio. From the bus stop in Arhanes follow signs up a steep trail to the burial grounds.

About 5km south of Arhanes, **Vathypetro Villa** (admission free; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), dating from about 1600 BC, was probably the home of a prosperous Minoan noble. Archaeologists discovered wine and oil presses, a weaving loom and a kiln in storerooms. There isn't any public transport to the site, although several travel agencies in Iraklio include a visit to the villa as part of their tours. It is well signposted from the town.

Some 1.5km northwest of Ano Arhanes is the Minoan site of **Anemospilia** (Wind Cave). Discovered in 1979, this middle-Minoan sanctuary is significant because it demonstrated that human sacrifice played at least some role in Minoan society (see boxed text, opposite). Unfortunately, the site is not open to the general public without special permission.

From Arhanes, it is a 4.2km drive or walk up to **Mt Yiouhta**, where there are great views and the remains of a Minoan peak sanctuary on the northern side.

HOUDETSI ΧΟΥΔΕΤΣΙ

pop 864

The otherwise unremarkable village of Houdetsi, is home to **Labyrinth Musical Workshop** and a **Museum of musical instruments**

(☎ 2810 741 027; www.labyrinthmusic.gr; admission €3; 🕒 10am-4pm Mar-Oct), created by much-lauded musician and honorary Cretan Ross Daly. With the help of the local municipality, Daly has transformed a derelict stone manor into a museum exhibiting part of his extensive collection of mostly stringed instruments from around the world. More than 250 rare and priceless instruments are on display and an interactive audio system allows you to hear the sound of each one.

Each summer, leading international traditional musicians attend workshops and master classes and hold concerts in the lovely grounds outside the centre. Don't be surprised if you see Turks, Afghans, Pakistanis, Bulgarians and Mongolians hanging out in Houdetsi. Daly, who is of Irish descent, is one of the leading exponents of the Cretan lyra and master of the modal non-harmonic music of Greece, the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, North Africa and North India. He has released more than 25 recordings (see p52).

A new accommodation option in Houdetsi is the restored stone **Petronikolis Traditional House** (☎ 2810 743 203; www.petronikolis.gr; apt €60-70; 🍷 🍷). Four spacious apartments are decorated in traditional style (except for the Indonesian dining settings), including some original agricultural equipment from the family estate. The family also has an attractive farmhouse 1.5km away in the middle of a vineyard and olive grove that sleeps up to four.

In town, the best dining option is **Roussos Taverna** (☎ 2810 742 189; 🕒 Jun-Oct lunch & dinner, Nov-May dinner only Tue-Sun), known for excellent Cretan cooking.

The steep dirt road above the village takes you over the hill to breathtaking views of the new **Tamiolakis Winery** (see p166).

There are three buses daily to Houdetsi (€2.20, 45 minutes).

THRAPSANO ΘΡΑΨΑΝΟ

pop 1381

Thrapsano, 32km south of Iraklio, attracts few visitors other than those visiting the town's **pottery workshops**. Thrapsano is a thriving centre for the production of huge distinctive Minoan-style *pithoi* that grace countless hotels, restaurants and homes across the island and are exported throughout the world. An annual pottery festival takes place in mid-July.

MURDER IN THE TEMPLE

Human sacrifice is not commonly associated with the peace-loving Minoans, but the evidence found at the site of Anemospilia near the village of Arhanes, 18km south of Iraklio, irrefutably suggests otherwise. During excavations at a simple three-room temple in the 1980s, scientists found the remains of a young man placed on an altar and trussed, with a huge sacrificial bronze dagger incised with the shape of a boar-like beast amid the bones. The remains of two other skeletons nearby – probably those of a priestess and an assistant – seemed to indicate that the boy's death was part of a sacrificial rite. Perhaps the sacrifice was made just as the 1700 BC earthquake began, in a desperate attempt to appease the gods.

Workshops scattered around the town are normally happy to let visitors see them at work. You can watch the giant pots being made at the traditional **Nikos Doxastakis workshop** (☎ 2891 041 160) up towards the municipal offices, while **Vasilakis Pottery** (☎ 2891 041 666), just past the lake turn-off, has smaller pieces you can take home, as has **Koutrakis Art** (☎ 2891 041 000), on the road into town.

Beyond some well-preserved frescoes in the 15th century two-aisled **Timios Stavros church** in the middle of the village, there's little to see or do.

Just outside the town on the road north to Apostoli is the **Livada Lake**, a preserved wetland with a bird-watching lookout and a run-down covered picnic area. The lake has doubled in size over time as potters have extracted clay from the lakebed. At the time of writing, a massive pottery museum was being constructed near the lake.

On the way to the lake you will pass the **Panagia Pigadiotissa church**, past the cemetery, where a monument has been built around an old 'miracle' well. Local legend has it that when anything (including people) fell into the well, the water rose to the top and saved them from drowning.

From Iraklio, Thrapsano is best reached via the Knossos road, turning off at the village of Agies Paraskies, near Peza. There are four buses daily to Thrapsano from Iraklio (€3.10, one hour).

WINE COUNTRY

The region south of Iraklio is Crete's prime vineyard, with about 70 per cent of wine produced in Crete coming from the Peza area. Along with Arhanes and Dafnes, these areas cultivate many Cretan grape varieties and produce designated appellation of origin wines.

There are growing opportunities for wine tasting. The impressive **Boutari Winery** (☎ 2810 731 617; www.boutari.gr; 1hr tour & tasting €4.50, tasting only €4; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), near Skalani, about 8km from Iraklio, is set on a hill in the middle of the Fantaxometoho estate, with an elegant tasting room and showroom overlooking the vineyard. Tours of the vineyard and winery include a quirky futuristic video on Crete in the cellar cinema, where you watch the high-tech show wearing headphones (choice of four languages) and learn how to taste wine.

You can also taste local wines in the heart of the wine region at Peza. The massive **Minos winery** (☎ 2810 741 213; www.minoswines.gr; tasting free, video & tour €2; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) and the **Pezas Union of local producers** (☎ 2810 741 945; www.pezaunion.gr; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) have tastings and videos, as well as mini-museums of the local wine industry. All sell wine at cheaper than retail prices.

A new boutique winery worth visiting is the superbly located **Tamiolakis Winery** (☎ 2810 742 083; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) in Houdetsi. This organic winery is one of Crete's excellent new generation wineries, with Bordeaux-trained winemakers, state-of-the-art equipment, visitor friendly facilities – and some fine wines using Cretan varieties. Their elegant tasting room overlooks the vineyards in a picturesque valley.

AVDOU ΑΒΔΟΥ

pop 320

The sleepy agricultural village of Avdou is only a 20-minute drive from the north coast town of Malia, but the two worlds could not be further apart. Half the houses in the village seem to be abandoned, while the rest are spruced up and flower-filled, including some restored by foreigners.

If you follow the signs to the town centre you will pass a mini-market and, turning left at the giant plane tree, come to a small square with a café, with a store and a couple of tavernas further along. There are four Byzantine churches around the village but the only one you can normally find open is the **Agios Antonios church**, which has some surviving frescoes. Ask a taverna for the key if it is locked.

Apart from the odd griffin vulture, a common sight in the skies above Avdou is the paragliders from the Avdou-based **International Centre of Rural Activities** (☎ 2897 051 200; www.ic.na.gr).

You can go horse riding up in the hills at **Odyssea Stables** (☎ 2897 051 080; www.horseriding.gr), in a stunning location about 2km along a dirt road from Avdou. Manolis Frangakis and his Dutch wife Sabine also run the adjacent classy **Velani Country Hotel** (www.countryhotel.gr; r €50-70), a relaxing place with simple, stylish rooms and

a lovely pool overlooking the valley. It is worth the trip just to eat at the attached **taverna**.

Accommodation options in Avdou are at the extreme ends of the spectrum. The two totally basic rooms in the village above Michalis Markantonakis' **Pantopoleion** (☎ 2897 051 243; r incl breakfast €20) are clean but barely fit two beds and share a communal wash basin and toilet on the balcony. You have to go to the owner's home to shower. Michalis also runs the taverna opposite, so you can have your dinner grilled downstairs and pour your own wine from the barrels in the storeroom across the street.

Avdou Villas (☎ 2810 300 540; www.avdou.com; apt €129-240; 🕒 🚿) is a significantly more upmarket rural complex on a farm just outside the village with fully self-contained apartments with all the modcons.

You can get a decent meal at **Strovili** (☎ 2897 051 039) on the main road next to the church, opposite the children's playground.

There are two buses daily to Avdou from Iraklio (€3.50, 30 minutes). From the main coastal highway, turn off at Malia for the village of Mohos.

ZAROS ΖΑΡΟΣ

pop 2081

If the name rings a bell, it's probably because 'Zaros' is the label on the litres of mineral

water you've been guzzling. Around 46km southwest of Iraklio, Zaros is a refreshingly unspoilt traditional village that's known for its spring water and bottling plant. Various excavations in the region indicate that the Minoans and the Romans settled here, lured by the abundant supply of fresh water. The spring water from Zaros also supplied the great Roman capital of Gortyna: Byzantine monasteries are nearly as abundant as the spring water. You can visit several of them and also walk the stunning Rouvas gorge. Zaros makes an ideal base for walkers and is relatively close to the nearby beaches of Kommos and the area's archaeological sites.

Orientation & Information

The business end of Zaros is at the southern entrance of the town. The post office and a supermarket are across the street from the police station. There's an ATM on the main street.

Sights & Activities

If you have your own wheels, the Byzantine monasteries and traditional villages tucked away in the hills are worth exploring. Take the road that leads west from Zaros and you will see a sign directing you to **Moni Agiou Nikolaou**, which is at the mouth of the verdant **Rouvas Gorge**. The monastery still houses several monks and the church contains some 14th-century paintings. A few kilometres further is the **Moni Agiou Andoniov Vrondisiou**, which is noteworthy for its 15th-century Venetian fountain and early 14th-century frescoes from the Cretan School.

The drive to the monasteries and further on to the traditional mountain villages of **Vorizia** and **Kamarea** is particularly scenic. From there, you can hike inland and up to Mt Psiloritis. You have a choice of heading westwards along the E4 trail down the mountain to Fourfouras or eastwards along the same trail down to the Nida Plateau. There is also a paved road to the village of Anogia.

The Zaros **bottling plant** in the northern end of town will usually allow you to take a look at operations. A short distance before the plant you will come to a lovely shady park, **Votomos**, with a small lake, a taverna and a children's playground, which makes a great picnic stop. From the lake, there is a walking path to Moni Agiou Nikolaou (900m) and the entry to Rouvas Gorge (2.5km), although it would be bet-

ter to do it the other way around and end up at the lake for lunch.

On the main road in town is the **lyra workshop** (☎ 2894 031 249) of well-known instrument maker Antonis Stefanakis, whose hand-made lyras are sold around the world. The workshop was to relocate to his newly built studios in the top of the village, where he was planning to display his collection of costumes from his days as a leading folk dancer.

Sleeping & Eating

Studios Keramos (☎/fax 2894 031 352; s/d incl breakfast €30/45; 🕒 🚿) Close to the village centre, this homely hotel run by the friendly Katerina is decorated with Cretan crafts, weaving and family heirlooms. Many of the rooms and studios have antique beds and furniture, some have TV and kitchenette. Katerina is up early cooking up a scrumptious and copious traditional Cretan breakfast – don't miss it.

Eleonas (☎ 2894 031 238; www.eleonas.gr; apts €56; 🕒 🚿) This is an attractive upscale mountain retreat set among the olive groves and terraced along the hillside overlooking a verdant valley. The smartly appointed apartments have all the mod cons including satellite TV and DVD players and cooking facilities. Horse riding, archery, mountain bikes and guided walking tours are on offer or you can just hang by the pool. There's a decent taverna attached.

I Limni (☎ 2894 031 338; trout per kg €22; 🕒 9am-late) Right on the lake, this taverna is a peaceful oasis serving fresh grilled trout and Cretan specialties. The basket of starters that comes out with the bread adds a nice touch.

Ourpick Vengera (☎ 2894 031 730) On the main street, this excellent taverna is run by vivacious Vivi and her mother Irini, who cook five or six traditional dishes daily. They also do special €25 meal- and- accommodation deals in nearby studios.

Votomos (☎ 2894 031 0710; trout per kg €27) Trout is the specialty at this taverna and trout farm just outside town past the Idi hotel.

A short drive from Zaros, in the neighbouring village of Nyvritos, the traditional-style *kafeneio* **Nivritos** (☎ 2894 031 296) has superb home-style food and doubles as an outlet for herbalist owner Dimitris Tsakalakakis' range of Cretan herbs.

Getting There & Away

There are two buses daily to Zaros from Iraklio (€4.10, one hour).

SOUTHERN IRAKLIO

The main highway that runs from Tymbaki to Pyrgos divides the northern part of the Iraklio prefecture from the southern coastal resorts. Along the highway are busy commercial centres, such as Tymbaki, Mires, Agii Deka and Pyrgos, that market the agricultural produce from the surrounding region. Although these towns hold little interest for tourists they do give a sense of the dynamism of the Cretan economy.

The south-central region of Crete is blessed with a trio of important archaeological sites – Phaestos, Agia Triada and Gortyna – and a cluster of minor sites spanning Cretan history from the Minoans to the Romans. Getting from one to the other ideally requires private transport or joining a comprehensive sites tour from Iraklio. Either way, allow some time to see the sites and consider basing yourself here for a day or two.

When you get tired of poking around ancient ruins, the south-coast beaches of Matala, Kommos, Kalamaki and Lendas beckon with long stretches of sandy beach. The road to the Agiofarango gorge takes you past the historic Moni Odigitrias. Further to the east are the quiet beach communities of Kastri and Keratokambos.

GORTYNA ΓΟΡΤΥΝΑ

The archaeological site of **Gortyna** (☎ 2892 031 144; admission €4; 🕒 8am-7.30pm, to 5pm winter), 46km southwest of Iraklio, is the largest in Crete and one of the most fascinating. Also called Gortyn or Gortys, Gortyna (*gor-tih-nah*) doesn't have much from the Minoan period because it was little more than a subject town of powerful Phaestos until it began accumulating riches (mostly from piracy) under the Dorians. By the 5th century BC, however, it was as influential as Knossos. When the island was under threat from the Romans, the Gortynians cleverly made a pact with them and, when the Romans conquered the island in 67 BC, they made Gortyna the island's capital. The city blossomed under the Roman administrators who endowed it with lavish public buildings, including a Praetorium, amphitheatre, public baths, a music school and temples. Except for the 7th century BC Temple of the Pythian Apollo and the 7th century AD Church of Agios Titos, most of what you see in Gortyna

dates from the Roman period. Gortyna's centuries of splendour came to an end in AD 824 when the Saracens raided the island and destroyed the city.

The vastness of the site indicates how important Gortyna city was to the Romans. The city sprawls over a square kilometre of plains, foothills and the summit of Mt Agios Ioannis. At one time there must have been ducts and an aqueduct that brought water from the springs of Votomos lake, 15km away, to service their elaborate systems of fountains and public baths. There also must have been streets and a town square, but these have not been excavated.

Although Italian archaeologist Federico Halbherr first explored the site during the 1880s, excavations are continuing.

Beginning south of the main road you'll first come to the **Temple of the Pythian Apollo**, which was the main sanctuary of pre-Roman Gortyna. Built in the 7th century BC, the temple was expanded in the 3rd century BC and converted into a Christian basilica in the 2nd century AD. Nearby is the **Praetorium** that was the palace of the Roman governor of Crete, an administrative building with a basilica and a private residence. Most of the ruins date from the 2nd century AD and were repaired in the 4th century. To the north is the 2nd-century **Nymphaeum**, a public bath supplied by an **aqueduct** bringing water from Zaros. It was originally adorned with statues of nymphs. South of the Nymphaeum is the **amphitheatre**, which dates from the late 2nd century AD.

The most impressive monument within the fenced area is the **Church of Agios Titos**, which is the finest early-Christian church in Crete. It was probably built on the site of an earlier church, but this construction dates from the 6th century. The stone cruciform church has two small apses and contains three levels, with the surviving apse providing a hint of its former magnificence. Nearby is the **Odeion**, a theatre built around the 1st century BC. Behind the Odeion is a plane tree that, according to legend, served as a love nest for Zeus and Europa.

Beyond the Odeion is the star attraction – the stone tablets engraved with the 6th-century-BC **Laws of Gortyna**. The 600 lines written in a Dorian dialect were the earliest law code in the Greek world. Ancient Cretans were preoccupied with the same issues that drive people into court today – marriage, divorce,

property transfers, inheritance and adoption, as well as criminal offences. They provide an insight into the social organisation of pre-Roman Crete. It was an extremely hierarchical society, divided into slaves and several categories of free citizens, each of whom had strictly delineated rights and obligations.

It's a bit of a hike but it's worth visiting the **Acropolis** at the top of the hill in the northwest corner of the site. Following the road along the stream near the Odeion you will come to a gate beyond the theatre that marks the start of the path to the top. In addition to a bird's-eye view of the entire site, the acropolis contains impressive sections of the pre-Roman ramparts.

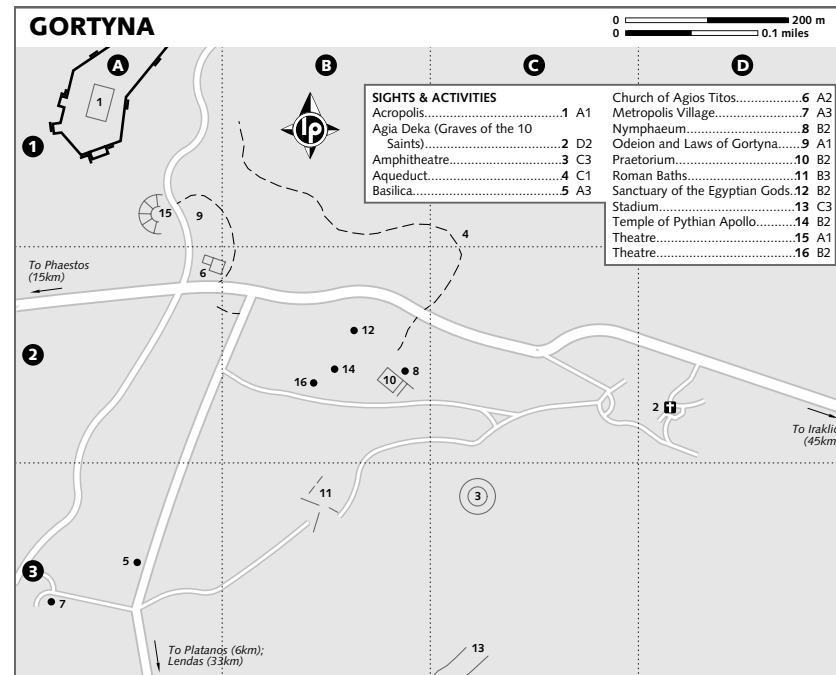
Buses to Phaestos from Iraklio also stop at Gortyna; see p171 for details.

PHAESTOS ΦΑΙΣΤΟΣ

The Minoan site of **Phaestos** (☎ 2892 042 315; admission €4/2, incl Agia Triada €6; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Jun-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Apr), 63km from Iraklio, was the second-most important palatial city in all of Minoan Crete. With amazing, all-embracing views of the Mesara Plain and Mt Psiloritis,

Phaestos (*fes-tos*), has the most awe-inspiring location of all the Minoan sites. The layout of the palace is similar to Knossos, with rooms arranged around a central court.

Pottery deposits indicate that the site was inhabited in the Neolithic era around 4000 BC, when the first settlers established themselves on the slopes of Kastri Hill. The first palace was built around 2000 BC and then destroyed by the earthquake that levelled many Minoan palaces. The ruins were covered with a layer of lime and debris, which formed the base of a new palace that was begun around 1700 BC. It, too, was destroyed in the catastrophe that befell the island in 1450 BC. In the intervening centuries Phaestos was the political and administrative centre of the Mesara Plain. Ancient texts refer to the palace's importance and note that it minted its own coins. Although Phaestos continued to be inhabited in later centuries, it fell into decline as Gortyna rose in importance. Under the Dorians, Phaestos headed a battling league of cities that included Matala and Polyrrinia in western Crete. Phaestos was defeated by Gortyna in the 2nd century BC.



Excavation of the site began in 1900 by Professor Federico Halbherr of the Italian School of Archaeology, which continues the excavation work. In contrast to Knossos, Phaestos has yielded few frescoes; it seems the palace walls were mostly covered with a layer of white gypsum. There has been no reconstruction of these ruins. The difficulty of visualising the structure of the palace is further compounded by the fact that the site includes remains of the Old Palace and the New Palace.

Exploring the Site

Past the ticket booth, the **Upper Court** that was used in both the Old and New Palaces contains the remains of buildings from the Hellenistic era. A stairway leads down to the

Theatral Area that was once the staging ground for performances. The seats are at the northern end, and the southern end contains the **west façade of the Old Palace**. The 15m-wide **grand stairway** leads to the **Propylon**, which was a porch. Below the Propylon are the **storerooms** that still contain *pithoi* (storage urns). The square hall next to the storerooms is thought to have been an **office**, where tablets containing Linear A script were found beneath the floor in 1955. South of the storeroom a **corridor** led to the west side of the **Central Court**. South of the corridor is a **lustral basin**, rooms with benches and a **pillar crypt** similar to that at Knossos. The Central Court is the centrepiece of the palace, affording spectacular views of the surrounding area. It is extremely

well preserved and gives a good sense of the magnificence of the palace. Porticoes with columns and pillars once lined the long sides of the Central Court. Notice the **Neolithic hut** at the southwestern corner of the Central Court. The best-preserved parts of the palace complex are the reception rooms and private apartments to the north of the Central Court, where excavations continue. Enter through the **Formal Doorway** with half columns at either side, the lower parts of which are still in situ. The corridor leads to the north court; the **Peristyle Court**, which once had a paved veranda, is to the left of here. The royal apartments (**Queen's Megaron** and **King's Megaron**) are northeast of the Peristyle Court but they are currently fenced off. The celebrated Phaes-

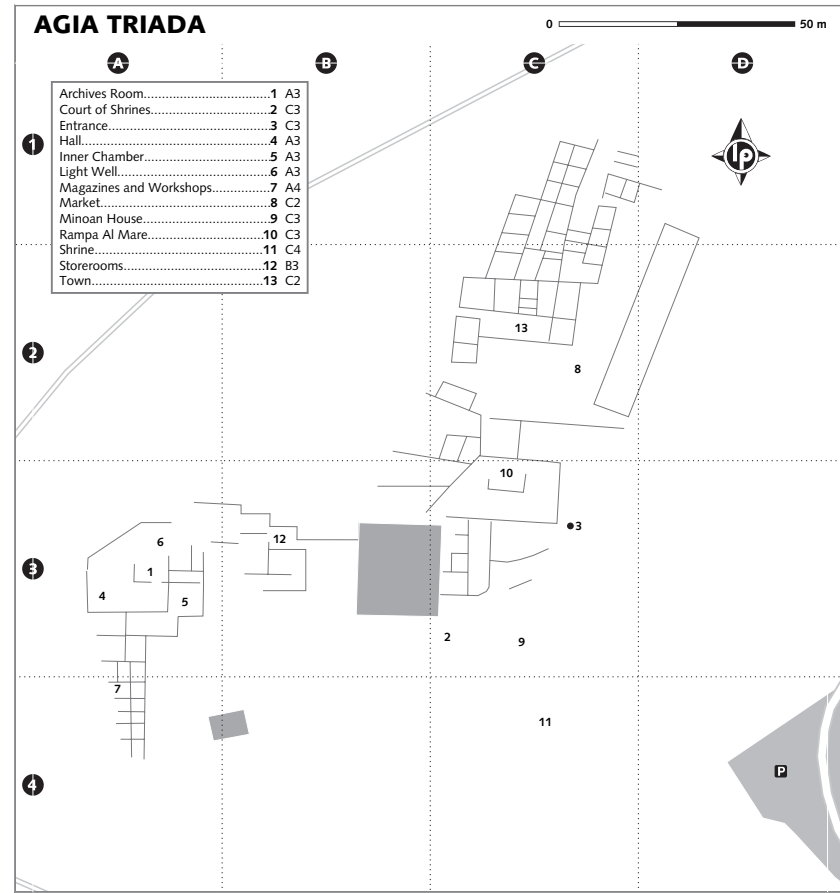
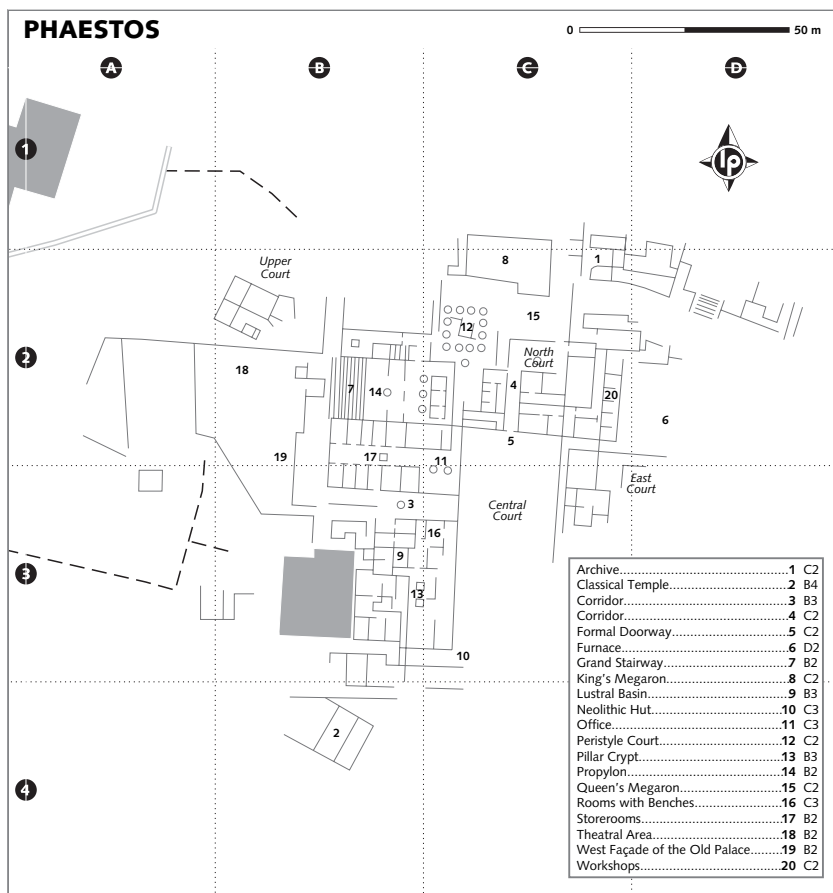
tos Disk (above) was found in a building to the north of the palace. It now resides in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio (p149).

Getting There & Away

Eight buses a day head to Phaestos from Iraklio (€5.70, 1½ hours), stopping at Gortyna. There are also buses from Agia Galini (€2.80, 45 minutes, five daily) and Matala (€1.60, 30 minutes, five daily).

AGIA TRIADA ΑΓΙΑ ΤΡΙΑΔΑ

The small Minoan site of **Agia Triada** (☎ 2892 091 564; admission €3, incl Phaestos €6; 🕒 10am-4.30pm summer, 8.30am-3pm winter) is 3km west of Phaestos in an enchanting landscape surrounded by hills and orange groves. Like the site of Phaestos,



it appears that Agia Triada has been occupied since the Neolithic era.

Masterpieces of Minoan art, such as the vases now in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio (p149), were found here, but the palace was clearly not as important as the palace at Phaestos. Its principal building was smaller than the other royal palaces, but the fact that it was built to a similar design and the opulence of the objects found indicate that it was a royal residence, possibly a summer palace of Phaestos' rulers.

After the entrance, you will first pass the ruins of a **Minoan House** before reaching the **shrine** that dates from the early 14th century BC. It once contained a frescoed floor painted with octopuses and dolphins, which is now in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio. Northwest of the shrine is a paved courtyard that excavators called the **Court of Shrines**. Notice the **magazines and workshops** in the southwest wing of the palace; the 'Chieftain's Cup' was found in one of these rooms. North of the workshops you will come to a **hall** and then the **inner chamber** that contains a raised slab that might have supported a bed, indicating that these were the residential quarters. The **archives room** once contained over 200 seal stones and a wall painting of the wild cat of Crete, which is now in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio. The **Rampa al Mare**, a ramp that runs beneath the north side of the palace, is thought to have run down to the sea at one point. A path leads from the fenced site along the hillside to a Minoan **cemetery** that dates from around 2000 BC. There are two circular beehive tombs.

There is no public transport to Agia Triada and the site is about a 5km walk from any major village. The road to Agia Triada takes off to the right about 500m from Phaestos on the road to Matala.

VORI ΒΟΡΟΙ

pop 744

The pleasant unspoilt village of Vori, 4km east of Tymbaki, has an attractive main square surrounded by winding streets of whitewashed houses. The surprise attraction here is the outstanding private **Museum of Cretan Ethnology** (☎ 2892 091 112/0; admission €3; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, by appointment in winter), which provides a fascinating insight into traditional Cretan culture. The English-labelled exhibits follow themes such as rural life, war, customs, architecture, music,

and the herbs, flora and fauna that form the basis of the Cretan diet. There some are some beautiful weavings, furniture, woodcarvings and musical instruments. The museum is well signposted from the main road.

There are a few tavernas around the lovely main square. Signposted about 400m up from the museum are the **Portokali Apartments** (☎ 2892 091 188; www.portokali.messara.de; studio €30; 🍴), four excellent good-value studios set in a garden with BBQ facilities and lots of homely touches. They have bikes for guests.

MATALA ΜΑΤΑΛΑ

pop 101

Matala (*ma-ta-la*), on the coast 11km southwest of Phaestos, was once one of Crete's best-known hippie hang-outs. When you see the dozens of eerie **caves** speckling the rock slab on the edge of the beach, you'll see why '60s hippies found it, like, groovy (see boxed text, opposite). The caves were originally Roman tombs cut out of the sandstone rock in the 1st century AD and have been used as dwellings for many centuries. Windows, doors and beds were carved out of the soft rock.

Since those halcyon hippy days, however, Matala has gone the way of many beach towns, expanding to the point where much of its original appeal has been lost. These days it is a struggling resort that depends on day trippers from the area's archaeological sites. The town is dominated by a tacky market selling souvenirs and clothing.

Matala still has its loyal returnees every summer. There is a beautiful sandy **beach** below the caves and the resort is a convenient base to visit Phaestos and Agia Triada.

Matala and the area around it is a popular nesting ground for *Caretta caretta* sea turtles. The Sea Turtle Protection Society has a booth near the car park.

Orientation & Information

The bus stop is on the central square, one block back from the waterfront, and there is parking before the town and beach (€2). There are ATMs in the village.

Monza Travel (☎ 28920 45757) Changes money.

Zafiria Internet (☎ 28920 45496; per hr €4; 🕒 8am-late)

Sights & Activities

The **caves** are fenced off at night, but there was no guard or entry charge when we were

there. For a less crowded beach, head to **Kokkini Ammos** (Red Beach). It's about a 30-minute scramble south over the rocks and attracts a smattering of nudists.

You can also take a beach or mountain ride in the area through **Melanouri Horse Farm** (☎ 2892 045 040; www.melanouri.com) in nearby Pitsidia.

Sleeping & Eating

The street running inland to the left of the main drag is lined with budget accommodation, which makes it easy to haggle for the best deal. Hotels are reasonably priced off-season.

Matala Community Camping (☎ /fax 2892 045 720; sites per person/tent €4.30/3) A reasonable, shaded, although rather uneven, site just back from the beach.

Fantastic Rooms to Rent (☎ 2892 045 362; fax 2892 045 292; s/d/tr €20/25/25, d & tr with kitchen €30; 🍴) Has been here since the hippie heydays, and has added a newer block at the back. The rooms are plain but comfortable, many with kitchenette, phone, kettle and fridge.

Pension Andonios (☎ 2892 045 123; fax 2892 045 690; d/tr €25/30) Run by the genial Antonis, this comfortable pension has attractively furnished rooms set around a lovely courtyard, many with kitchenette, and the top rooms have balconies.

Hotel Zafiria (☎ 2892 045 366; fax 2892 045 725; d incl breakfast €40; 🍴 🍷 🍴) The sprawling Zafiria takes up a whole block on Matala's main street. There is a spacious lobby bar and the comfortable rooms have balconies, sea views and telephones, and there's a pool a beneath the cliffs.

Eating in Matala is hardly an experience in haute cuisine, and little to distinguish any of the tourist joints on the waterfront. Overlooking the beach, **Lions** (☎ 2892 045 108; specials €6-9) has been popular for many years and the food

is better than average. It is also a good place for a drink as it gets lively in the evening.

Gianni's (☎ 2892 045 719; mains €5-7), towards the end of the main street, is a no-frills place that has good-value grills, including a mixed grill with salad and potatoes (€7).

Head out of town 1.2km to the **Mystical View** (☎ 6944 139 164) tavern with spectacular sunset views over Kommos beach.

Getting There & Away

There are five buses daily between Iraklio and Matala (€6.80, 2½ hours), and Matala and Phaestos (€1.60, 30 minutes).

AROUND MATALA

There are several other bases from which to explore this southern pocket of Iraklio, especially if you stay in an inland village.

Pitsidia, 5km northeast of Matala off the main road, is quiet during the day when most people are at the beach, but has a pleasant village ambience in the evenings. **Pension Aretooussa** (☎ 2892 045 555; www.pensionaretooussa.com; s/d/tr €27/33/45) on the main road has large terrace out the front for breakfast. The rooms are clean, nicely decorated with paintings by the owner, Michalis, and nice touches like mosquito nets. The back rooms have access to a private garden making them ideal for families.

Apart from the great wood-oven pizzas, **Bodikos Rooms & Pizzeria** (☎ 2892 045 438; www.bodikos-matala.com; d €35) place has large comfortable studios and rooms upstairs, as well as some family accommodation nearby.

In town, the places to hang out in the evening are the friendly **Mike's** (☎ 28920 45007) and **Eva and Nikos** (☎ 2892 045 497), a popular taverna on the main square.

Buses to Matala stop on the main road. The village square is inland.

THE HIPPIE CONNECTION

Long before Mykonos was hip and Los was hot, Matala was host to a colony of flower children and alternative lifestyles who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, turned Matala into a modern troglodyte city.

Drawn by the lure of free cave accommodation, a gorgeous beach, a smattering of low-key, cheap tavernas, free love and copious pot, Matala's hippies came in droves and hung around – wearing little more than headbands and guitars. They moved ever higher up the cliff to avoid sporadic attempts by the local police to evict them. Singer Joni Mitchell was among the hippies who lived in the caves. In 'Carey' from her 1970's album *Blue* she sang: *but let's not talk about fare-thee-wells now, the night is a stary dome and they're playin' that scratchy rock and roll beneath the Matala moon.*

DETOUR: Towards the Agiofarango Gorge

There is something truly divine about this isolated southwest pocket of Iraklio, which combines a visit to a monastery, a picturesque and easy gorge walk and rewards you with a swim in an isolated cove.

About 7km from the turn-off for Sivas is **Moni Odigitrias** (☎ 2892 042 364; 🕒 9am-8pm), a historic monastery with a preserved tower from which the monks fought off the Turks, Germans and the odd pirate. These days they'll let you climb up for superb views. The monastery was a base for many monks who lived as hermits in the surrounding caves and remote chapels. There is small museum with the original olive and wine presses, giant pots, a raki still and other agricultural tools. The Panagia church has some 15th-century frescos and icons.

A signposted track opposite the monastery marks the trail to the less-traversed **Agiofarango** (Holy gorge). From this point it is an hour walk to the start of the gorge. You can drive further along down a dirt road and leave the car at a point where it is only about 20 minutes to the gorge entrance, but it can be pretty rough. The picturesque gorge is bedecked with oleander and its steep rock face makes it a popular spot for climbers. There are caves and makeshift chapels and hermitages in the cliffs, and right in the gorge at the half way point is the Byzantine chapel of **Agios Antonios**. The gorge emerges at a lovely pebble cove and crystal-clear beach, which most of the time is only occupied by other walkers (and the occasional excursion boat).

On the way back, reward yourself with a stop at the **Kafeneio Xasou** (☎ 2892 042 804; mezedes €2.50-4; 🕒 Tue-Sat 4pm-11pm, Sun 10am-11pm) on the main road as you pass the village of Listaros. The owners moved here from Athens for a quiet life and are active environmentalists. Sylla is also a mean cook, experimenting with traditional recipes with superb results.

Further north from Pitsidia, about 2km inland from the main road is the pretty village of **Sivas**, which has a lively main square and many heritage-protected stone buildings.

our pick **Sigelakis** (☎ 28920 42748; mains €5-6; 🕒 dinner only) is a popular dinner option just off the square. Friendly owner Yiorgos is renowned for his traditional cooking and dishes such as the delicious goat in tomato sauce, the grilled mushrooms and a tasty eggplant slice with garlic and tomato. He has also built comfortable and attractive new **studios** (www.sigelakis-studios.gr; r €45-50) nearby.

KOMMOS KOMMOΣ

The archaeological site of Kommos, 12km southwest of Mires along a beautiful beach, is still being excavated by American and Canadian archaeologists. Although the site is fenced off it's easy to get an idea of it from the outside. Kommos is believed to have been the port for Phaestos and contains a wealth of Minoan structures. It's even possible to spot the layout of the ancient town, with its streets and courtyards, and the remains of workshops, dwellings and temples. Notice the Minoan road paved in limestone that leads from the southern section inland towards Phaestos; the ruts in the road from Minoan carts and a sewer on its northern side are still visible.

Kommos is about 3km north of Matala and makes for a pleasant walk.

KAMILARI KAMHΛAPI

pop 263

Built on three hills, Kamilari is a traditional village with impossible narrow streets winding through the centre of town. It's no secret, but it has not yet been adversely affected by tourism. Most of the accommodation is on the outskirts of town and locals generally outnumber visitors. Its proximity to Kalamaki Beach and central location make it a good base to explore the south-coast beaches and archaeological sites.

In the middle of fields about 3km from the village is an important and extraordinarily well-preserved circular **Minoan tomb** with stone walls still standing two metres high. Clay models depicting the funerary rituals unearthed by excavators are in the Archaeological Museum of Iraklio (p149). The road to the tomb is signposted at the entrance to Kamilari. It is a good half-hour walk.

Sleeping & Eating

Apartments Ambeliotissa (☎ /fax 2892 042 690; www.ambeliotissa.com; studio €25-50; 🕒 🍷) This family-friendly place has pleasant furnished studios and apartments with balconies overlooking

the garden and kitchen facilities. There's an outdoor BBQ and playground and they have bikes for guests. They also run Studios Pelekanos nearby.

Plaka Apartments (☎ 2892 042 697; www.plakakreta.com; d €30-35; 🕒 🍷) These lovely well-appointed apartments on a hill just outside the village have balconies with sea views and are decorated in cool blue and white shades. There is a garden with sun lounges in the back. Ask at Taverna Mylonas.

Asterousia Apartments (☎ 28920 42832; www.asterousia.com; studio €35-50) The hammock out the front, a scattering of antiques and brightly painted open-plan rooms give this place a great ambience. There's a big old table on the veranda and a nice garden, making it a good base for longer stays and families.

Taverna Mylonas (☎ 2892 042 156; mains €5.50-6.50) This place has good home-cooked Cretan food in the centre of the village, and they have also added some Italian and Chinese-style dishes. There are great views of the surrounding mountains from the tables on the terrace.

Kentriko (☎ 2892 042 191; mains €5.50-6.50) In a restored stone *kafeneio* on the narrow main drag, this place is run by the friendly Greek-Australian Irini, who has black- and- white photos of village families on the walls. It also has internet access.

Getting There & Away

There is one bus daily from Iraklio's Bus Station B via Mires (€6, 1½ hours).

KALAMAKI KΑΛΑΜΑΚΙ

pop 71

The wide, sandy beach that stretches for many kilometres in either direction is Kalamaki's best feature and makes for a pleasant walk. Located 2.5km southwest of Kamilari, tourism here is in its embryonic stage. It's a quiet place to stay and the swimming is good.

There is one main road leading into the village square, which is right behind the beach. **Monza Travel** (☎ /fax 28920 45692; 🕒 9am-2pm & 5-10pm) handles car and bike rentals, hotel reservations, air and boat tickets, and excursions around Crete.

Sleeping & Eating

Kostas (☎ /fax 28920 45692; www.kreta-kalamaki.com; d €25-70; 🕒 🍷) These rooms above Monza Travel have fridges, TV and coffee-making equipment, and enjoy a communal roof garden that

is great at night. Rooms of different sizes and configurations sleep up to six.

Pension Galini (☎ 2892 045 042; www.kreta-kalamaki.com; r & apt €30-60; 🕒 🍷) About 30m away from the beach, this attractive complex has spacious rooms and apartments sleeping up to six, with balconies, fully equipped kitchens satellite TV and internet connectivity. There's also a rooftop terrace with sea views.

Yiannis (☎ 2892 045 685; mixed mezedes spread €7-9) It's easy to miss this tiny place, behind the hotels that blocked the sea views. But Yiannis retains a loyal following for his excellent no-nonsense mezedes at reasonable prices – he usually makes about 18 types of mezedes (€1.80 to €2.50), including lots of vegetarian dishes, and there's always a complimentary glass of raki.

Delfinia (☎ 2829 045 697; fish per kg €30-45) This fish taverna at the northern end of the beach is one of the most highly regarded in the area. They also do a great range of mezedes.

Getting There & Away

There is one bus daily from Iraklio's Bus Station B via Mires (€6.80, two hours).

KAPETANIANA KΑΠΕΤΑΝΙΑΝΑ

pop 98

There are two main reasons to take the journey through the Mesara plain and make the winding steep ascent to the remote mountain hamlet of Kapetaniana – climbing and walking. Perched on the lower slopes of Mt Kofinas (1231m), about 60km from Iraklio, Kapetaniana (from the word 'captain') was where the Cretan rebel leaders lived and where, much later, some hippies from Matala came hiding from the police. Today this wild and picturesque spot is popular territory for serious walkers and nature lovers. Mt Kofinas is also the most popular climbing destination in Crete (see p74). The village is divided into an upper and lower village.

In Ano (upper) Kapetaniana, the delightful guesthouse **Pension Kofinas** (☎ 28930 41440; www.korifi.de; s/d €20/25) is operated by Austrian ex-hippies Gunnar and Louisa, who moved there in the '80s when there was no sealed road (it was finished in 2005). They run guided walks and organise hiking tours. They have only four rooms, one with dorm bunks, which all share an external toilet. Bookings are essential. Gourmet chef Gunnar rustles up a scrumptious dinner for guests (€12-15 including

wine) on the terrace, which has superb views of Kofinas and out to sea.

In Kato Kapetaniana, about 15 houses were being restored and turned into rural retreats.

LENDAS ΛΕΝΤΑΣ

pop 78

The major appeal of the small beach settlement at Lendas is its remoteness and laid-back feel. Reached via a long and winding road with a dramatic last few kilometres descending to the village, Lendas clings to the cliff over the beach and has a pleasant view over the Libyan Sea. The narrow pebbly beaches are pleasant enough, but there are some better beaches to explore nearby and some stunning rock formations. Lendas attracts mostly independent travellers, including regulars who have been coming for 20 years. It retains an appealing intimacy, plus a peacefulness that comes from not having any passing traffic. There is a lively beach scene, with a couple of beach bars.

Within walking distance there is an archaeological site and the **Diskos** (or Dytikos) naturist beach where old hippies from Matala camp on the beach.

Orientation & Information

As you enter the village, a left fork takes you to the eastern car park, while the right fork goes to the main 'square'. The bus stops outside the eastern car park. Lendas has only a couple of mini-markets for essential supplies and an **Internet café** (☎ 2829 095 206; per hr €3) on the main square. Make sure you have plenty of petrol as you are a long way from the nearest supply.

To get to Dytikos beach follow the main road west for 1km or the path alongside the coastal cliffs.

Sights

The archaeological site of **Lebena** is right outside the village. Lebena was a health spa that the Romans visited for its therapeutic springs. Only two granite columns remain of a temple that dates from the 4th century BC. Next to the temple was a treasury with a mosaic floor that is still visible. Very little else is decipherable and the springs have been closed since the 1960s.

Sleeping & Eating

Bungalows Lendas (☎ 28920 95221; s/d €22/25-40; 🍽) This quiet complex west of the main square has great sea views from the balconies. The

rooms are simple but clean, with basic bathrooms and a fridge. There's a central communal kitchen. The gruff family matriarch runs the **Elpida taverna** on the beach and is well known for her traditional cooking.

Studios Gaitani (☎ 2892 0953 41; www.studios-gaitani.gr; studio €30-50; 🍽) It doesn't get more beachfront than this. These modern studios are a few steps down to the sand. They have kitchenettes, TV and fridge, and the larger ones can fit up to four.

Our pick: El Greco (☎ 2892 095 322; www.lentas-elgreco.com; specials €4.50-9) This friendly taverna run by three brothers has an excellent selection of *mayirefta* and traditional Greek and international dishes in a garden setting overlooking the sea. There are decent sea-view rooms with air-con behind the taverna and spacious studios across the road (€30 to €40).

Also recommended is the **Akti** (☎ 2892 095 206; mains €6-10) taverna next door, for good quality food and a decent selection of wines.

Across the way in Dytikos (see left), **Villa Tsapakis** (☎ 2892 095 378; www.villa-tsapakis.gr; d/studio €25/30-35; 🍽) is a friendly hotel with well-appointed, good-value rooms around central courtyard.

Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus from Iraklio (€7.10, 2½ hours).

KASTRI & KERATOKAMBOS ΚΑΣΤΡΙ & ΚΕΡΑΤΟΚΑΜΠΟΣ

pop 316

At the twin mini-resorts and now contiguous villages of Kastri and Keratokambos, 13km downhill, there's a pleasant tree-lined beach and a number of eating and sleeping choices. The tranquillity of this tiny resort is its chief asset. Many Germans have moved in and bought property here. If you like peace and quiet and have a few books to read, this is your kind of place. There are no facilities other than a mini-market.

Sleeping & Eating

Filoxenia Apartments (☎ /fax 2895 051 371; studio €25-30; 🍽) These lovely two- to- three-person studios, wrapped in a flower-filled garden, are equipped with kitchenette, fridge and TV, and make for a very pleasant base. They are right across from the beach.

Komis Studios (☎ 2895 051 390; www.komisstudios.gr; Keratokambos; apt incl breakfast €60-75; 🍽) These classy

upmarket apartments are attractively decorated in rustic style, with iron beds and old TVs and movie posters on the walls. They are well outfitted with telephone, TV, hairdryers and can accommodate two to four people.

The tavernas along the beach generally offer very good value. **Taverna Nikitas** (☎ 2895 051 477; mains €4-6) offers consistently high-quality and delicious grills. The goat in red sauce is highly recommended, as is the local swordfish. **Taverna Livyko** (☎ 2895 051 290; grills €5.50-7) makes tasty grills from its own meat, along with fresh fish and Cretan specials such as boiled goat and lamb with artichokes. The setting is delightful. Also recommended is the cheery Morning Star Taverna decked out in classic blue and white.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport available to Kastri and Keratokambos.

NORTHEASTERN COAST

Ever since the national road along the northern coast opened in 1972, the coast between Iraklio and Malia has seen a frenzy of unbridled development, particularly on the seaside towns of Hersonisos and Malia. There's not much here for individual travellers since the hotels deal almost exclusively with package-tour operators who block-book hotel rooms months in advance.

The village of Koutouloufari, above Hersonisos, is the most appealing place to stay in this area. The Minoan palace at Malia is the only significant site of cultural interest, and there is an important aquarium in Gournes. Amid the low-brow establishments, there are several high-end resorts and Crete's only world-class 18-hole golf course.

HERSONISOS & MALIA ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ/ΜΑΛΙΑ

The northern resorts of Hersonisos and Malia have seen better days. Hersonisos, 27km east of Iraklio, began its days as a small fishing village on a hill, but these days the resort that grew along the long sandy beach is a brash, expansive mecca of cheap package tourism, with a long coastal strip of neon-lit restaurants and look-alike hotels. While there are a few big and high-end resort hotels in the area, the towns themselves holds little appeal. Admit-

tedly, Hersonisos has the liveliest nightlife on the island, which is fine if you want to party all night and crash on a crowded beach (or stay cocooned in a resort). Or is this author just a snobbish killjoy?

Malia, about 7km east, is Crete's 'wild-est' party resort and has become even more notorious (and irredeemable) since they cracked down on the hooligan element in Faliraki (Rhodes), bringing the worst elements of young British holidaymakers to Crete. Crowded and noisy, Malia is full of pubs, bars, tacky eateries, and sunburnt topless Brits hooning around on quad bikes, making it seem like one big fun park (or nightmare). The scale of overdevelopment is confronting to the senses. Many hotels only deal with tour operators, but the travel agents in town can usually recommend places they have deals with.

The only noteworthy attraction in the area is the excellent **Lychnostatis Museum** (☎ 2897 023 660; www.lychnostatis.gr; admission €4.50; 🕒 9.30am-2pm Sun-Fri). Instead of selling out or building a hotel on the family land right next to the beach, the Markakis family have commendably created this unique open-air museum dedicated to Cretan rural life. There are displays about all aspects of traditional rural life from weaving to raki-making, a Cretan herb garden, as well as a small *kafeneio*. Instead of inscriptions there are clever *mandinades* (traditional rhyming songs), including the verses painted on the walls of the mill dedicated to the owner's wife.

On the other side of the highway about 7km south of Hersonisos is the 18-hole **Crete Golf Club** (☎ 2897 026 000; www.crete-golf.gr; 18 holes €67). It's a tough desert-style course on the hills that's definitely not for hackers. It's cheaper to play at twilight (€42).

There are buses to Hersonisos and Malia from Iraklio every 30 minutes (€3.50, 45 minutes).

KOUTOULOUFARI ΚΟΥΤΟΥΛΟΥΦΑΡΗ pop 538

Uphill from the madness, past the old villages of Hersonisos and Piskopiniana, is the more appealing village of Koutouloufari, which although touristy retains some semblance of charm. The main road is closed off at night, creating a festive atmosphere. It's a safe distance from the sprawling resort town below but close enough to check it out.

Sleeping & Eating

Villa Iokasti (☎ 2897 022 607; www.iokasti.gr; apt €70-80; 🏠 🚿) One- and two-bedroom apartments in an attractive garden setting off the main drag towards the end of the village. It has a well-regarded taverna and café with pleasant sea views.

Elen Mari Apartments (☎ 2897 025 525; Koutouloufari; apt €40; 🏠 🚿) The fully equipped studios are neat and well maintained and some have excellent views over Hersonisos.

Emmanuel Taverna (☎ 2897 021 022; Plateia Eleftheriou Venizelou, specials €10) Managed by a Greek-Australian family, this homely taverna specialises in spit-roasted meats and dishes cooked in the wood oven out the front. The owner

recommends their specialty lamb in rose wine with bay leaves, or anything from the spit or oven, which are fired up every night.

Fabrica (☎ 2897 023 981; crepes €2.50-7.50) In the evening, head to this café-bar with a great rooftop terrace with views below to Hersonisos. It's in an old stone building to the right past Sergiani. Take the turn off to the right as soon as you get off the Hersonisos turn-off.

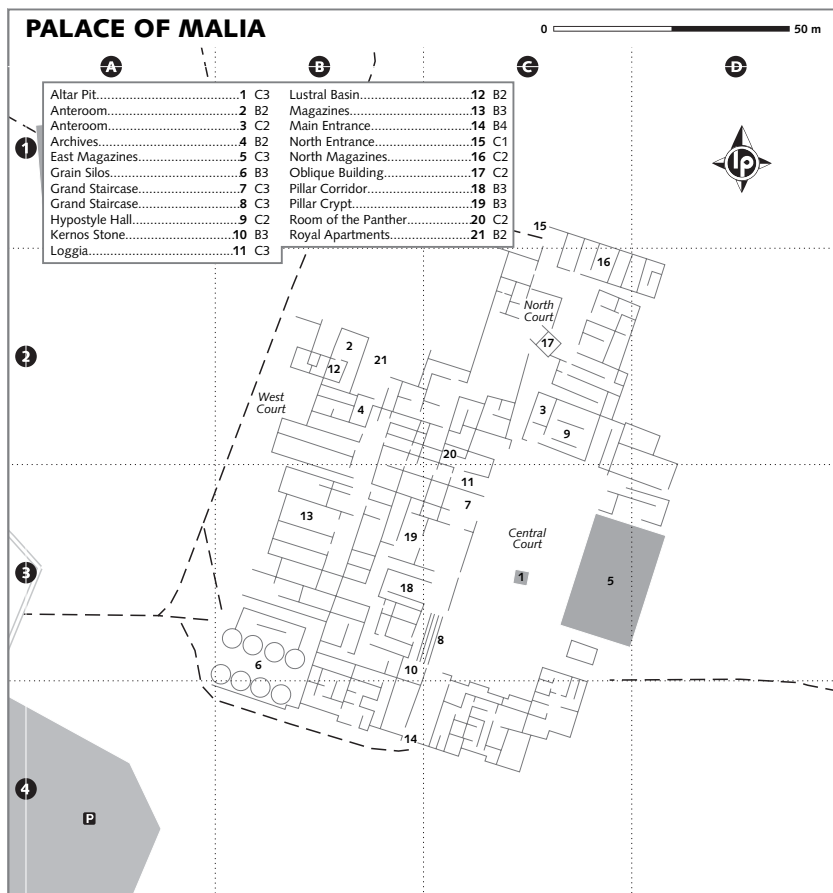
PALACE OF MALIA ANAKTOPA ΜΑΛΙΩΝ

The **Palace of Malia** (☎ 2897 031 597; admission €4; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), 3km east of Malia, was built at about the same time as the two other great Minoan palaces at Phaestos and Knos-

MASS TOURISM

While some people clearly enjoy the scene at Hersonisos and Malia, most travellers wanting to see Crete will have the same first instinct as they approach the resorts – get out fast. The local population itself has retreated to the villages up the hill behind the main road and left the lower beachfront area to wallow in sleazy commercialism. Everything is designed for tourist consumption and mostly aimed at young party animals.

Both resorts chase bargain-hunting package tourists but Hersonisos has a few luxury hotels on the outskirts. The crowds are generally young in both towns, but in Malia you'll feel decrepit if you're over 22. Consuming copious quantities of alcohol is the main game. In Hersonisos you drink to get drunk, dance and wake up with a stranger, while at Malia you drink to get drunk, fall down and wake up on the pavement. If that sounds good to you, you know where to go. But try to visit Crete one day.



os. The first palace was built here around 1900 BC and rebuilt after the earthquake of 1700 BC. What you see is the remains of the newer palace where many exquisite artefacts from Minoan society were found. Excavation began in 1915 by Greek archaeologists and is being continued by French archaeologists. Because the ground plan has been well preserved, it is an easy site to comprehend. The exhibition hall has reconstructions of the site and interesting photos, including aerial shots. There is a shady spot to rest and take in the site and a café. The beach nearby (about 300m on the right) is one of the best swimming spots in the area.

Exploring the Site

Access to the ruins is from the **West Court**. Head south through the **Magazines** and at the extreme southern end you'll come to the eight circular pits which archaeologists think were **grain silos**. To the east of the pits is the main entrance to the palace, which leads to the southern end of the **Central Court**. Moving northeast you'll come to the **Kernos Stone**, a disk with 24 holes around its edge. Archaeologists have yet to ascertain its function, but it probably had a religious purpose. Adjacent

to this is the **Grand Staircase**, which might have led to a shrine. To the north is the **Pillar Corridor** with interconnecting rooms and next to it is the **Pillar Crypt** with the Minoan double-axe symbol engraved up on the pillars. The impressive **Central Court** is 48m long and 22m wide and contains remains of the Minoan columns. Notice the covered altar pit in the centre of the courtyard.

At the northern end of the western side of the court is the **Loggia**, which was probably used for ceremonial purposes. Next to the Loggia is the **Room of the Panther** in which a 17th-century-BC stone axe shaped like a panther was found. Northwest are the **Royal Apartments** with a **Lustral Basin**. At the north end of the central court is the **Hypostyle Hall**, with benches on the side indicating that it may have served as a kind of council chamber. Other rooms include the **archives room** in which tablets containing Linear A script were found. The covered area off the central court are the **East Magazines**. On your way out through the north entrance take note of the giant *pitthoi* in the **North Court**.

Any bus going to or from Iraklio along the north coast can drop you at the site.

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