

Rethymno Ρεθυμνο



Rethymno is Crete's most compact and mountainous prefecture, boasting the island's highest peak, Mt Psiloritis, in the east. Its central position makes it a good base for seeing the island's key sights and gives you a broad taste of what Crete has to offer. While it lacks the big draw cards of neighbouring Hania and Iraklio, Rethymno is not short of attractions.

Rethymno prides itself on being the cultural capital of the island, with a rich musical tradition and its historic importance during the Renaissance. The charming old town of Rethymno's capital is one of the island's architectural treasures, with its stunning fortress, picturesque Venetian harbour and mixture of Venetian and Turkish houses in the labyrinth of the old quarter. East of Rethymno town is Crete's longest stretch of sandy beach, home to a string of big hotel complexes, while further toward Iraklio are the smaller-scale resorts of Panormo and Bali.

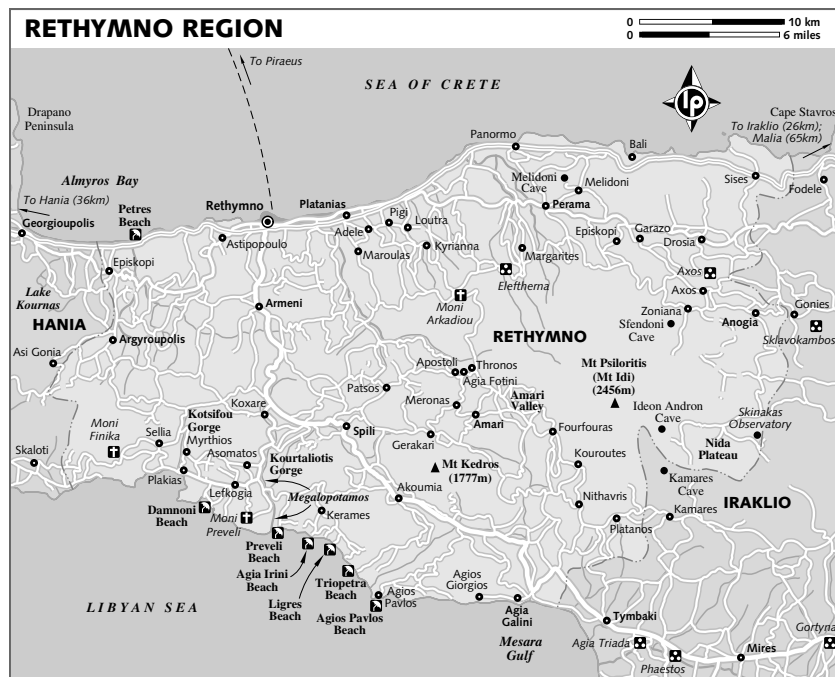
Inland, you can explore diverse traditional villages, including the tiny agricultural villages of the Amari Valley, the town of Anogia, known for fine musicians and infamous huge weddings, and the pottery village of Margarites. Travellers on their way south stop at Spili to drink from its lion-head Venetian fountain, while the tavernas among the springs of Argyroupolis are a delightful respite from the summer heat.

Rethymno has three famous caves – Melidoni, Zoniana and the Ideon cave near Mt Psiloritis, where Zeus was allegedly reared. The south-coast resorts of Agia Galini and Plakias have their loyal following, while further west the rugged cliffs are interspersed with some of the island's finest unspoilt beaches. Rethymno also has two of Crete's most historically significant monasteries – Moni Arkadiou in the north and the Moni Preveli overlooking the Libyan sea.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Strolling the maze of narrow streets in Rethymno's **Venetian and Turkish old town** (p123)
- Cooling off by the springs of **Argyroupolis** (p130)
- Exploring the unspoilt southern beaches, from **Preveli** (p141) to **Agios Pavlos** (p141)
- Hitting the northern coastal resorts of **Bali** (p144) and **Panormo** (p143)
- Visiting the **Preveli monastery** (p140)
- Listening to *mandinades* (rhyming couplets) by moonlight in **Anogia** (p136)





RETHYMNO ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ

pop 28,959

Rethymno (*reth-im-no*) is the island's third-largest town and one of the most picturesque, with a charming Venetian harbour and delightful old Venetian-Ottoman quarter.

The old quarter is a maze of narrow streets draped in floral canopies, graceful wood-balconied houses and ornate Venetian monuments, with minarets adding a touch of the Orient. While architectural similarities invite comparison with Hania, Rethymno has a character all its own.

HISTORY

The name Rethymno means 'stream of water' and evidence (to be found in the city's archaeological museum) indicates that the site of modern Rethymno has been occupied since Late Minoan times. In the 3rd and 4th centuries BC, 'Rithymna' emerged as an autonomous state of sufficient stature to issue its own coinage. Ancient Rithymna probably lay at the base of Palekastro Hill but its re-

mains have never been excavated, although later Roman mosaics have been found beneath the modern town.

The town prospered once more under the Venetians, who ruled from 1210 until 1645, and turned Rethymno (which they renamed Castel Vecchio) into an important commercial centre exporting wine and oil. The town flourished artistically under the Venetians and became the seat of a Venetian prefect. They built the harbour and began fortifying the town in the 16th century against the growing threat from the Turks. Michele Sanmicheli, the best military architect of the era, designed the thick outer walls, of which only the Porto Guora survives. The walls did not stop the city from being sacked by the pirate Barbarossa in 1538.

The Venetians then built the massive fortress on the hill, which nevertheless was unable to withstand the Turkish assault of 1646 and collapsed after a 22-day siege. Rethymno was an important seat of government under the Turks but it was also a centre of resistance to Turkish rule. The Turks inflicted severe reprisals upon the town for its role in the uprising of 1821, but the resistance continued.

Turkish forces held the town until 1897, when it was taken by Russia as part of the occupation of Crete by the Great Powers. Rethymno became an artistic and intellectual centre after the arrival of a large number of refugees from Smyrna in 1923.

These days, the city has a campus of the University of Crete, attracting a large student population that keeps the town lively outside the tourist season.

ORIENTATION

Rethymno is a fairly compact town with most of the major sights, accommodation and places to stay and eat within a small area off the old Venetian harbour. Most of the old town is pedestrian-only and parking can be a nightmare so you are better off leaving the car in one of the car parks (see Map pp124–5).

The old quarter occupies the headland north of Dimakopoulou, which runs from Plateia Vardinogianni on the western side to Plateia Iroön on the east. This is where you'll find the most atmospheric hotels and eateries. Banks and services are to the south on the edge of the new town.

The beach is on the eastern side of town, around from the Venetian harbour. One block back from the beach is Arkadiou, the main commercial and shopping street.

If you arrive by bus, you will be dropped at the rather inconveniently located terminal about 600m west of the Porto Guora, the historic gate to the old town. If you arrive by ferry, the old quarter is at the end of the quay.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Book Store Mediterraneo (☎ 28310 23417; Mavrokordatou 2) English books, travel guides and foreign press.

Ilias Spondidakis bookshop (☎ 28310 54307; Souliou 43) Novels in English, books about Greece, tapes of Greek music; small secondhand section.

Xenos Typos (☎ 28310 29405; Ethnikis Antistaseos 21) Foreign press, guidebooks and maps.

Emergency

Tourist police (☎ 28310 28156; Delfini Bldg, Eleftheriou Venizelou; ☎ 7am–2.30pm) In the same building as the municipal tourist office.

Internet Access

Cybernet (Kallergi 44–46; per hr €3; ☎ 10am–5am)
Galero (☎ 28310 54345; Plateia Rimondi; per hr €3; ☎ 6am–late)

Laundry

Laundry Mat (☎ 28310 29722; Tombazi 45; wash & dry €9; ☎ 8.30am–2pm & 5.30–9pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–2.15pm Sat) Next door to the youth hostel.

Left Luggage

KTEL (☎ 28310 22659; cnr Kefalogiannidon & Igoumenou Gavriil) The bus station stores luggage for €1.50 per day.

Medical Services

Rethymno Hospital (☎ 28210 27491; Triandydou 17; ☎ 24hr)

Money

Alpha Bank (Pavlu Koundouriotou 29) Has a 24-hour automatic exchange machine and ATM.

National Bank of Greece (Dimokratias) On the far side of the square opposite the town hall.

National Mortgage Bank Next to the town hall, has a 24-hour automatic exchange machine and ATM.

Post

Post office (☎ 28310 22303; Moatsou 21; ☎ 7am–7pm Mon–Fri)

Toilets

There is a reasonable public toilet near the Venetian harbour just off Arkadiou.

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (☎ 28310 29148; www.rethymno.gr; Delfini Bldg, Eleftheriou Venizelou; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–8.30pm Sat & Sun Mar–Nov).

Prefecture tourist office (☎ 28310 25571 www.rethymnon.gr; Dimokratias 1; ☎ 7.30am–3pm Mon–Fri).

Travel Agencies

Elotia Tours (☎ 28310 24533; www.rethymnoatcrete.com; Arkadiou 155; ☎ 9am–9pm Mar–Nov) Helpful office that handles boat and plane tickets, changes money, rents cars and motorcycles, and books excursions.

SIGHTS

Rethymno's 16th-century **fortezza** (fortress; ☎ 28310 28101; Paleokastro Hill; admission €3.10; ☎ 8am–8pm Jun–Oct) is on the site of the city's ancient acropolis. Within its massive walls a great number of buildings once stood, of which only a church and a mosque survive intact. The ramparts offer good views, while the site has lots of ruins to explore. The main gate is opposite the Archaeological Museum on the eastern side of the fortress, but there were once

RETHYMNO

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Venetian Harbour

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Scale: 0 200m / 0 0.1 miles

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Scale: 0 200m / 0 0.1 miles

two other gates on the western and northern sides for the delivery of supplies and ammunition. In summer it is a stunning concert venue for the Renaissance Festival (p126).

Rethymno's tiny **Venetian harbour** is crammed with fish tavernas and cafés fronted by touts, but you can get a better sense of it by walking along the old harbour walls past the fishing boats to the landmark **lighthouse**, built later by the Turks.

The small **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 28310 54668; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), near the entrance to the fortress, was once a prison. The exhibits are well labelled in English and contain Neolithic tools, Minoan pottery excavated from nearby tombs, Mycenaean figurines and a 1st-century-AD relief of Aphrodite, as well as an important coin collection. There are also some excellent examples of blown glass from the classical period. Various displays outline the history of archaeological excavations in the region. Rethymno's **Historical & Folk Art Museum** (☎ 28310 23398; Vernardou 28-30; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) gives an excellent overview of the area's rural lifestyle, with its collection of clothing, baskets, weavings and farm tools, and useful explanatory labels. It is in a lovely historic Venetian building.

Pride of place among the many vestiges of Venetian rule goes to the **Rimondi Fountain** with its spouting lion heads and Corinthian capitals, built first in 1588 and rebuilt in 1626 by a rector of the city, A Rimondi. Another major landmark is the 16th-century **Loggia** (a Venetian version of a gentleman's club), once a meeting house for Venetian nobility, now a museum shop selling good-quality reproductions.

At the southern end of Ethnikis Antistaseos is the well-preserved **Porto Guora** (Great Gate), a remnant of the defensive wall that was once topped with the symbol of Venice: the Lion of St Mark, now in the Archaeological Museum. Around the Porto Guora lies a network of old streets built by the Venetians and rebuilt by the Turks. The **Centre for Byzantine Art** (☎ 28210 50120; Ethnikis Antistaseos; ☎ 10am-2pm & 7pm-late) is a great example of a restored Venetian-Turkish mansion and has exhibitions, workshops and a terrace café with great views of the old town. Other Turkish legacies in the old quarter include the **Kara Musa Pasha Mosque**, which has a vaulted fountain, and the **Nerantzes Mosque**, which was converted from a Franciscan church in 1657. It now houses the **Hellenic**

Conservatory (☎ 28310 22724; Vernadou 1; ☹ closed August) and makes a lovely venue for concerts and recitals. The management is happy for you to have a look around. The building's minaret, built in 1890, was being restored at the time of writing.

The **Municipal Art Gallery** (☎ /fax 28310 52530; Himaras 5 & Melissinou; ☹ 9am-2pm Tue-Sun, 5-9pm Wed) near the fortezza houses a permanent exhibition of works by Rethymno painter Lefteris Kanakakis, as well as contemporary Greek artists since 1950. It is part of the **Centre for Contemporary Art** (www.rac.gr; ☹ 9am-1pm & 7-10pm Tue-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun), which holds periodic exhibitions. The pleasant **municipal park** offers a respite from the heat and crowds.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking

The **Happy Walker** (☎ /fax 28310 52920; www.happywalker.com; Tombazi 56; ☹ 5pm-8.30pm) runs various walks in the region, including complete walking holidays.

Rethymno's chapter of the Greek Mountaineering Club **EOS** (EOS; ☎ 28310 57766; www.eos.rethymnon.com; Dimokratias 12; ☹ 8.30-10.30pm) can give advice on the region.

Bike Riding

Cycling enthusiast and Greek Paralympic champion **Odysseas the Cyclist** (☎ /fax 28310 58178; odysseasthecyclist@hotmail.com; Velouhioti 31) runs small guided rides in the area including half-day tours to Arkadi, Margarites and Argyroupoli (€40) and full-day rides to Preveli (€60). He has top brand bikes for hire and also runs tailored tours for people with disabilities.

Diving

The **Paradise Dive Centre** (☎ 28310 26317; www.diving-center.gr) runs diving activities and PADI courses for all grades of divers from their base at Petres, about 15 minutes west of Rethymno. **Kalypso Rock's Palace Dive Centre** (☎ 28310 20990; www.kalypsodivingcenter.com; Eleftheriou Venizelou 42) runs a slick diving operation, mostly from its diving base in Plakias (Map p122) on the southern coast.

TOURS

Rethymno is well placed for boat excursions. Along the harbour front there are several companies that offer boat trips, including **Dolphin Cruises** (☎ 28310 57666), which offers three-hour trips on the 'pirate ship' to nearby caves, Pan-

ormo and Bali (adult/child under 12 €25/12), all-day trips to Marathi beach (€34/17), and fishing trips on a speedboat (€25).

Travel agents sell a range of coach excursions to key sites, including the Samaria Gorge (€28), Elafonisi (€26) and Gramvousa (€24). Prices exclude admission charges and boat fares.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Rethymno's main cultural event is the annual **Renaissance Festival** (☎ 28310 51199; www.rfr.gr), which runs from July to September. Held primarily in the open-air **Erofilis Theatre** at the fortezza, it features performances by Greece's leading theatre companies, as well as dance, music and acts from around Europe. It promotes both the Cretan and European Renaissance, so you will get anything from Shakespeare and Molière to Cretan playwrights. Get programmes and tickets at the **town hall** (☎ 28310 88279; ☹ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Fri) or from the Erofilis Theatre one hour before performances.

Most years there's a **Wine Festival** in mid-July, which is held in the municipal park and offers a good opportunity to sample local wine and cuisine. Ask the tourist office for details. Rethymno is also renowned for its annual **carnival celebration** (http://carnival-in-rethymnon-greece.com), a three week pre-Lent celebration of dancing and masquerading, games and treasure hunts and a grand street parade. It usually falls around January or February.

SLEEPING

The old town has an ample supply of lovely restored mansions, boutique hotels and friendly pensions to cater for all budgets, and many hotels are open all year. To the east is an endless stretch of hotels and resorts.

Budget

Elizabeth Camping (☎ 28310 28694; www.camping-elizabeth.com; sites per person €6.54, tent small/large €4.85/5.65) Located near Mysiria beach, 3km east of Rethymno, this is the nearest camping ground. There's a taverna, snack bar and mini-market, plus a communal fridge, free beach umbrellas and sun lounges, and a weekly beach BBQ. An Iraklio-bound bus can drop you here.

Rethymno Youth Hostel (☎ 28310 22848; www.yh.rethymno.com; Tombazi 41; dm with shared bathroom €9; ☹) The hostel is friendly and well run with free

hot showers. Breakfast is available from €2 and there's a bar in the evening. There is no curfew and the place is open all year.

Barbara Dokimaki Rooms (☎ 28310 24581; alicedok@yahoo.com; Damvergi 14; s €30, d €45-60, tr €70; ☹) This well-located complex of rooms in a Venetian building with a newer 2nd-floor addition is set around a pleasant courtyard. The rooms are simple with timber floors and some period features. They have TV and dated but functional bathrooms.

Sea Front (☎ 28310 51981; www.forthnet.gr/elotia; Arkadiou 159; d €35-45; ☹) This conveniently located pension on the beach has pleasant budget rooms with timber floors and fridge. They also have cheerful studio apartments with sea views and ceiling fans further towards the town beach, and rooms in another building nearby.

ourpick Atelier (☎ 28310 24440; atelier@ret.forthnet.gr; Himaras 27; d €35-45) One of the best value options are these clean and attractively refurbished rooms attached to a pottery workshop. Both are run by Froso Bora. They have exposed stone walls and many Venetian architectural features, as well as small flat-screen TVs, new bathrooms and kitchenettes.

Olga's Pension (☎ 28310 28665; Souliou 57; s/d/tr €35/45/65) Friendly Olga's is tucked away on touristy but colourful Souliou. It has a faded charm, with a quirky décor and a network of terraces bursting with flowers and greenery that connect a range of dated but colourful rooms. Most have a fridge, TV, fan and basic bathrooms. Rates include breakfast at Stella's kitchen downstairs.

Byzantine Hotel (☎ 28310 55609; Vosporou 26; d incl breakfast €45) The excellent-value small hotel in a historic building near the Porta Guora maintains a traditional feel. The rooms are simply decorated with carved timber furniture and some have bathtubs. The back rooms overlook the old mosque and minaret. At the time of writing there were plans to install air-con.

Midrange

Hotel Fortezza (☎ 28310 55551; www.fortezza.gr; Melissinou 16; s/d incl breakfast €62/75; P ☹) Housed in a refurbished old building in the heart of the old town, the tasteful rooms have TVs and telephones. After a day of roaming through Rethymno, it's pleasant to relax by the swimming pool.

Casa dei Delfini (☎ 28310 55120; kzaxa@reth.gr; Niki-forou Foka 66-68; studios €45-70, ste €80-140; ☹) Turk-

ish and Venetian architectural features have been cleverly maintained in this elegant pension, including an old stone trough and the *hammam* (Turkish bath) ceiling in one of the studio bathrooms. There is a range of traditionally decorated rooms, all with kitchenettes, through the most impressive is the massive *maisonette* with a large private terrace.

Hotel Ideon (☎ 28310 28667; www.hotelideon.gr; Plastira 10; s/d €54/75, studio/apt incl breakfast €90/105; ☹) This polished central establishment is one of the oldest hotels in town, spread over two restored old buildings and a modern wing. The rooms are nicely decorated and well appointed and there are balconies with sea views. The courtyard pool spares you the long walk to Rethymno's beach.

Hotel Veneto (☎ 28310 56634; www.veneto.gr; Epimenidou 4; studio/ste incl breakfast €124/143; ☹) The oldest part of the hotel dates from the 14th century and many traditional features have been preserved without sacrificing modern comforts. There's a stunning pebble mosaic in the foyer and the eye-catching rooms of polished wood floors and ceilings have iron beds, satellite TV and kitchenettes. Rates drop significantly out of high season.

Top End

ourpick Vetera Suites (☎ 28310 23844; www.vetera.gr; Kastriogiannaki 39; d €85-150; ☹) These six elegant suites stand out for their attention to detail, from the lace curtains to the mastic bath products and china tea sets for breakfast. Each room is stylishly decorated with iron beds and antiques, and comes with a neatly concealed kitchenette. The bathroom tiles feature paintings by the owner's favourite artist, Degas, and there are DVD players and other mod cons, including access for laptops.

Palazzo Rimondi (☎ 28310 51289; www.palazzo-rimondi.com; Xanthoudidou 21 & Trikoupis 16; d studio/ste incl breakfast €160-190; ☹) This charming Venetian mansion in the heart of the old city has exquisite individually decorated studios with kitchenettes. There's a small splash pool in the courtyard where breakfast is served.

Palazzini di Corina (☎ 28310 21205; www.corina.gr; Damvergi 9; d €120, ste €160-220; ☹) This regal Venetian mansion right near the harbour is one of the classiest boutique hotels in town. Decorated with antique furniture, it has been beautifully restored, with exposed stone walls, timber vaulted ceilings and a lovely internal mosaic courtyard. Prices include breakfast.

Avli Lounge Apartments (☎ 28310 58250; www.avli.gr; cnr Xanthoudidou 22 & Radamanthios; r incl à la carte breakfast €199-239; 🍴) These decadent eclectic suites are spread over two beautifully restored Venetian buildings in Rethymno's historic old town. There are ornate iron or wooden beds, antiques, exquisite furnishings and *objets d'art*. A fitting place to retire after spoiling yourself with dinner in Avli's ambient courtyard garden.

EATING

The waterfront along Eleftheriou Venizelou is lined with similar tourist restaurants staffed by fast-talking touts, as is the Venetian harbour except that the setting is better and the prices higher. The best places are in the web of side streets inland from the harbour, while a couple warrant a trip outside the tourist zone.

Budget

Taverna Kyria Maria (☎ 28310 29078; Moshovitou 20; Cretan dishes €2.50-6.50) This good value traditional taverna behind the Rimondi Fountain has outdoor seating and birdcages hanging from the leafy trellis. Meals normally end with a complimentary dessert and shot of raki.

Zisi's (☎ 28310 28814; Old Rethymno-Iraklion Rd Mysiria; grills €3.20-6; 📞 closed Tue) Locals swear by Zisi's for cheap, quality Cretan food, particularly the charcoal-grilled meats and the 25 or so daily trays of home-style dishes. It's a little out of town along the stretch of beachfront hotels and resorts (on right just before the Creta Palace), but is worth the trip. Kids will love the new playground.

Samaria (☎ 28310 24681; Eleftheriou Venizelou; mayirefta €4-6.50) Of the waterfront tavernas, this is one of the few where you'll see local families eating. There's a large range of *mayirefta* (casseroles), and the soups and grills are excellent.

Nikiforos (☎ 28310 55403; Moatsou 40; mains €4-7; 📞 noon-10pm) It may lack the atmosphere of the old town, but this traditional *mayirefta* in the new town churns out trays of home-style cooking for hungry locals and does a decent takeaway trade.

Kapilio (☎ 28310 52001; Xanthoudidou 7; set menu for €12.50-13.80) Popular with students, this Serb-run *mezedopoleio* has a mixed menu with a range of special set menus that include raki, wine, salad and a main dish.

Midrange

Ourpick Thalassografia (☎ 28310 52569; Kefalogiannidon 33; mezedes €3.80-7.30) This excellent *mezedopoleio* is the place to watch the sunset and try some fine mezedes, as well as a few pastas and more hearty meals. It's a casual place with a breathtaking setting under the *fortezza*, taking in views over the sea. The grilled sardines are excellent, as are the creamy mushrooms.

Fanari (☎ 28310 54849; Kefalogiannidon 15; mezedes €2.50-10) West of the Venetian harbour, this welcoming waterfront taverna serves good mezedes, fresh fish and Cretan cuisine. The *bekri mezese* (pork with wine and peppers) is excellent, or try the local speciality, *apaki* (smoked pork). The homemade wine is decent, too.

Castelvecchio (☎ 28310 55163; Himaras 29; mains €7-16; 📞 dinner only Jul & Aug, lunch & dinner Sep-Jun) The affable Valantis will make you really feel at home in the garden terrace of this family taverna located on the edge of the *fortezza*. Try the *kleftiko* (slow oven-baked lamb).

Lemonokipos (☎ 28310 57087; Ethnikis Antistaseos 100; mains €5.80-9) Dine among the lemon trees in the lovely courtyard of this well-respected taverna in the old quarter. It's good typical Cretan fare, with a decent range of vegetarian dishes and lots of tasty appetisers.

Also recommended is **Othonas** (☎ 28310 55500; Petihaki 27) for traditional Cretan food. It looks touristy on the outside but is decent. It's a member of Concred (p57) and uses quality produce.

Top End

Ourpick Avli (☎ 28310 26213; www.avli.com; cnr Xanthoudidou 22 & Radamanthios; mains €13.50-30). This former Venetian villa is the place for a romantic evening out, or at least one with maximum ambience. The nouveau-Cretan style food is superb and there's an idyllic garden courtyard bursting with pots of herbs, bougainvillea canopies, fruit trees and works of art. The sleek wine bar in the adjacent old stables boasts more than 400 Greek wines. They've also opened the more casual Raki Baraki (Radamanthios 16) mezedes bar, with live music Thursday to Sunday.

Prima Plora (☎ 28310 24925; Akrotirou 2, Koumbes; seafood mezedes €5.50-16) This stylish modern restaurant on the developing beachfront strip on the western side of town is worth the hike. It has an exceptional setting with tables right on the water near an old Venetian water pump

with views of the *fortezza*. It has a sophisticated menu of top-quality seafood dishes such as prawn risotto, and uses organic vegetables.

ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Clubs

The bars and cafés along El Venizelou fill up on summer evenings with pink-skinned tourists nursing tropical drinks. Rethymno's livelier nightlife is concentrated around Nearhou and Salaminos near the Venetian harbour, as well as the waterfront bars off Plastira Square. Students frequent the lively *rakadika* (cafés serving carafes of raki or wine with mezedes) on Vernadou.

Fortezza Disco (Nearhou 20; 📞 11pm-dawn) The town's veteran disco is big and flashy with three bars, a laser show and an international crowd that starts drifting in around midnight.

Rock Club Café (☎ 28310 31047; Petihaki 8; 📞 9pm-dawn) is one of Rethymno's classic hang-outs; tourists fills the club nightly.

Figaro (☎ 28310 29431; Vernardou 21; 📞 11am-late) Housed in a cleverly restored old building, Figaro is an atmospheric 'art and music' all-day bar that attracts a subdued crowd.

Baja Beach Club (☎ 28310 20333; Plataniyas) On the old highway east of the town, this massive beach bar is like a tropical paradise with palm trees and bars around a big pool. At night it morphs into a happening club. The turn-off is just before the bridge.

Cinemas

Asteria Cinema (☎ 28310 22830; Melissinou 21; tickets €7; 📞 9pm) A small open-air cinema showing new-release movies.

SHOPPING

Rethymno's shopping strip is relatively compact, with an assortment of shops sell-

ing everything from souvenirs to high-end jewellery. You'll find better quality mainstream merchandise on Arkadiou. Colourful Souliou is crammed with little shops. The Thursday market on Dimitrakaki along the public gardens has fresh produce, clothing and odds and ends.

Omodamos (☎ 28310 58763; www.omodamos.com; Souliou 3) The original ceramic designs in this shop are made by leading ceramists from around Greece.

Zominthos (☎ 28310 52673; Arkadiou 129) This shop has an eclectic selection of jewellery from contemporary Greek designers as well as some ceramics and sculptures.

En Hordais (☎ 28310 29043; Varda Kalergi 38) This tiny store packed with handmade musical instruments is the place to get that Cretan *lyra* (a three-stringed instrument similar to a violin), bouzouki or other Greek musical instruments.

Silverhorse (☎ 28310 51401; www.silverhorse.gr; Radamanthios 10) This place specialises in handmade belts, leather goods, saddles and other interesting leather paraphernalia, which it can make to order.

Avli Raw Materials (☎ 28310 58228; Arabatzoglou 38-40) Foodies will love this store packed with a huge range of gourmet delights from around Greece, including an excellent selection of wine.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Boat

Note that some ferries leave from the port and others from the marina further east.

ANEK (☎ 28310 29221; www.aneke.gr; Arkadiou 250) Ferry three times a week between Rethymno and Piraeus (€29, 10 hours), leaving both Rethymno and Piraeus at 8pm.

NEL LINES (☎ 28310 24295; www.nel.gr) Runs a high-speed service between Rethymno and Piraeus (€57, five

SWEET TREATS

One of the last traditional filo masters in all of Greece, **Yiorgos Hatziparaskos** (☎ 28310 29488; Vernardou 30) still makes super-fine pastry by hand in his traditional workshop. The highlight is when he throws the dough into a giant bubble before stretching it over a huge table. His wife Katerina encourages passers-by to watch the spectacle and try some of best *baklava* and *kataifi* they will ever eat.

At **Mona Liza** (☎ 28310 23082; Paleologou 36), around the corner from the Loggia, Nikos Skartsilakis is legendary for his 'crema' ice cream made from sheep's milk, as well as his excellent sweets. Try the *galaktoboureko* (custard pastries), the walnut pie, or *vrahaki*, chocolate with almonds.

Loukoumades, the donut-like concoctions with honey and cinnamon, have been perfected by **Kanakakis** (☎ 28310 22426; Plateia Martyron), just outside the Porto Guora, while locals swear by the ice cream at **Meli** (☎ 28310 50847; S Venizelou 7) on the waterfront.

hours) daily from July to September (four times a week May to June).

SeaJets (www.seajets.gr) Runs the Superjet catamaran high-speed service on Thursday and Saturday between Rethymno and Santorini (€37.90, two hours 40 minutes), Ios, Naxos and Mykonos (€58).

Bus

From the **bus station** (☎ 28310 22212; Igoumenou Gavriil) there are hourly summer services to both Hania (€6, one hour) and Iraklio (€6.50, 1½ hours). There are also six buses a day to Plakias (€3.50, one hour); six to Agia Galini (€5.30, 1½ hours); three to Moni Arkadiou (€2.40, 40 minutes); two to Omalos (€11.90, two hours); two daily from Monday to Friday to Margarites (€3, 30 minutes); two daily Monday to Friday to Anogia (€4.50, 1¼ hours); and four to Preveli (€4, 1¼ hours). There are daily buses to Hora Sfakion via Vryses. Services are greatly reduced in the low season.

GETTING AROUND

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

AROUND RETHYMNO

The hinterland villages of Rethymno make for pleasant excursion if you have your own wheels. The hills are not too taxing, the roads not too busy and the scenery is pleasantly verdant. There are at least a couple of villages to the southwest of Rethymno that make for an ideal afternoon jaunt.

Episkopi, 23km west of Rethymno, is a pretty, traditional town of winding lanes and tiny houses, overlooking the valley. The springs and waterfalls of Argypolis (right) are a delightfully cool surprise. **Maroulas** (p132), 10km southeast of Rethymno, is a delightful historic town with commanding sea views.

The lovely village of **Asi Gonia** will give you some insight into traditional life in Crete. Every year around St George's day (23 April), Asi Gonia hosts an amazing spectacle with its stock-breeder's festival, when thousands of goats and sheep are gathered in and around the church to be blessed and milked (the milk given out to the crowd). The festivities continue into the evening.

THE VILLAGE TAVERN

The mountain village tavern, one of the delights of travelling through Crete, is experiencing a revival. A spate of new tavernas serving traditional Cretan cuisine, albeit in more stylish surrounds, are breathing new life into rural villages. Around Rethymno, you are spoiled for choice. One of the best tavernas is **O Kipos Tis Arkoude-nas** (☎ 28310 61607) near Episkopi, east of Rethymno, which has superb organic produce and many dishes cooked in the wood oven. Another excellent new arrival is **Goules** (☎ 28310 41001) in a lovely restored stone *kafeneio* in the tiny village of Goulediana, south of Rethymno.

ARGYROUPOLIS ΑΡΓΥΡΟΥΠΟΛΗ

pop 398

When the summer heat becomes too intense for the beach, you'll find a natural, outdoor air-conditioning system at Argypolis, 25km southwest of Rethymno. At the bottom of this village is a watery oasis formed by mountain springs that keeps the temperature markedly cooler than on the coast. Running through aqueducts, washing down walls, seeping from stones and pouring from spigots, the gushing spring water supplies the entire city of Rethymno.

Towering chestnut and plane trees and luxuriant vegetation create a shady, restful spot for lunch among the waterfalls and fountains that have been incorporated into all the tavernas. Argypolis is built on the ruins of the ancient city of Lappa. The villagers maintain a traditional lifestyle, largely undisturbed by tourism, but are proud of their heritage and eager to show you around. The innovative Stelios Manousakas at the **Lappa Avocado Shop** (☎ 28310 81070), just off the main square, is a good source of information and provides town maps (he is also the town mayor). You can also pick up a supply of his excellent avocado-based creams and skin products, which are made from the family's avocado plantation and exported to Athens and France.

The turn-off to the springs and tavernas is signposted to your right before the village.

Sights

The main square is recognisable by the 17th-century Venetian **Church of Agios Ioannis**. There

is a quaint private **museum of village life** on the main street above a mini-market run by the Zografakis family (see below). The dynamic Eleftheria has amassed an eclectic collection of family heirlooms and historic items from nearby villages. If it is closed, call in at the taverna or shop and they will give you a private tour.

The old town is entered through the stone archway opposite the church. Roman remnants are scattered amid the Venetian and Turkish structures.

The main street will take you past a **Roman gate** on the left with the inscription *Omnia Mundi Fumus et Umbra* (all things in this world are smoke and shadow). In a few metres a narrow street to the right leads down to a 3rd-century-BC **marble water reservoir** with seven interior arches.

Returning to the main road and continuing in the same direction you will see on the left a **Roman mosaic floor**, dating from the 1st century BC. With 7000 pieces in six colours, the well-preserved floor is a good example from the Geometric Period (1200–800 BC).

A couple of signposted roads lead to the tavernas clustered around the springs below the town, but it's best to get a map from the Lappa Avocado Shop (opposite). A path from the bottom of the Paleos Mylos tavern (below) leads to a well-preserved 17th-century water-driven **fulling machine**, which was used to thicken cloth by moistening and beating it. Nearby you can find a **Roman bath** and **St Mary's Church**, built on a temple devoted to Neptune.

North of the town, a footpath on the right takes you about 50m to a **Roman necropolis** with hundreds of tombs cut into the cliffs. The path leads on to a **plane tree** that is supposed to be 2000 years old.

Sleeping & Eating

Lappa Apartments (☎ 28310 81204; d €30-35; ☎) Right in the village, these homely apartments set around a courtyard with a lovely garden enjoy great views of the mountains. They are fully equipped with good-sized fridges, decent bathrooms and there are BBQ facilities. It is perfect for longer stays or families.

Zografakis (☎ 28310 81269; d €25-30) On the main road, the Zografakis family rent decent clean and cheap rooms above the taverna.

The tavernas at the springs are a little touristy and overpriced, but you can't go too wrong and the setting is spectacular.

You will struggle to hear yourself over the sound of the running water and cicadas at the old water mill **Paleos Mylos** (☎ 28310 81209; mains €6-9.90), the last taverna on you right down the hill. The verdant location is superb and the grills and salad are a safe bet. Across the road, **Athivoles** (☎ 28310 81101) has excellent fresh trout, local meat and Cretan cuisine.

Getting There & Away

There are two daily buses from Rethymno (€2.80, 40 minutes) to Argypolis, Monday to Friday.

MONI AGIA IRINIS ΜΟΝΗ ΑΓΙΑ ΕΙΡΙΝΗΣ

About 5km south of Rethymno, before the village of the same name, you will come across the fortress-like **Moni Agia Irinis** (☎ 28310 27791; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4pm-sunset). The Byzantine building was badly damaged by the Turks and was abandoned for more than 150 years until its restoration began in 1989 by the dynamic nuns who run the monastery today. It has become a centre for the preservation of handicrafts and needlework and has a permanent exhibition of weaving and embroidery. It also sells handicrafts and icons produced by the nuns. Parts of the historic building have been restored, including the stables, wine press and refectory.

ARMENI ΑΡΜΕΝΟΙ

Heading south from Rethymno, there is a turn-off to the right to the Late Minoan **Cemetery of Armeni**, 2km before the modern village of Armeni. Some 200 tombs were carved into the rock here between 1300 and 1150 BC, in the midst of an oak forest. The curious feature of this cemetery is that there does not seem to have been any sizable town nearby that would have accounted for so many tombs. Pottery, weapons and jewellery excavated from the tombs are now on display at the Archaeological Museum (p125) in Rethymno.

At Armeni an excellent place to stop for lunch is **Alekos Kafeneio** (☎ 28320 41185) next to a small square off the main road. This unexpected gem that's been run by the same family for three generations has a small but superb daily selection of traditional dishes such as lamb *tsigariasto* with a hint of yogurt, served with an impressive house salad. The rabbit is also recommended.

THE HINTERLAND

Rethymno's mountainous hinterland offers a diverse range of routes and interesting detours. In the lush Amari Valley you'll come across unspoilt bucolic villages. On the way to the historic Arkadi monastery you can stop at the pottery village of Margarites and see the ruins of Ancient Eleftherna. Heading east you can explore some historic caves and have coffee in the squares of one of Crete's most famous and traditional towns, Anogia.

AMARI VALLEY ΚΟΙΛΑΔΑ ΑΜΑΡΙΟΥ

You'll need your own transport to explore the Amari Valley, southeast of Rethymno, between Mts Psiloritis and Kedros. This region harbours around 40 well-watered, unspoilt villages set amid olive groves, almond and cherry trees and many lovely Byzantine churches. The valley begins in the picturesque village of **Apostoli**, 25km southeast of Rethymno, reached via a scenic drive through a wild and deserted gorge bordered by high cliffs. The turn-off for Apostoli is on the coast 3km east of Rethymno. The road forks at Apostoli and

CRETAN BEER

When Düsseldorf-born mathematician Bernd Brink moved to Crete after marrying a Cretan girl, he did what any self-respecting German would do – open a brewery. Since opening in 2001, the boutique **Rethymni-aki Brewery** (☎ 28310 41243; 🕒 2pm-late Thu-Mon Jul-Oct) – Crete's only brewery – has progressed from cleaning bottles and labelling by hand to a sophisticated operation producing about 150,000 bottles per year. Its well-regarded organic Rethymnian blonde and dark lagers are sold all over Greece. You can drop by and sample them, along with some meze, at the mini-taverna and beer garden on site. It's about 12km south of Rethymno near Armeni.

then joins up again 38km to the south, making it possible to do a circular drive around the valley; alternatively, you can continue south to Agia Galini.

Taking the left fork from Apostoli you'll come to the village of **Thronos** with its Church of the Panagia constructed on the remains of

DETOUR: MAROULAS

Enjoying a stunning position perched on a rise with panoramic sea views, the protected historic settlement of Maroulas, 10km southeast of Rethymno, is spotted by a well-preserved 44m tower jutting above the village. The fortified town has a mix of late Venetian and Turkish architecture, including 10 olive presses. Much of it was being restored and is a delight to wander through.

Maroulas is home to **Marianna's Herb Workshop** (☎ 28310 72432; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm summer) a treasure trove of alternative herbal remedies and concoctions. Marianna collects aromatic medicinal herbs from the mountains to make her unique range of teas and oils from natural extracts using traditional methods. She has products for all manner of ailments, as well as skin products and herbs for cooking. Her teas include Sarantovotano, a mix of 40 herbs that midwives used to boil up so that they might pass the baby through the steam for its first breath.

Marianna's interest in alternative therapies took her back to her roots to ancient remedies and her hobby became a full-time obsession when she moved to Maroulas in the mid-1990s. She hit the mountains and consulted older locals about identifying Crete's various herbs. 'This knowledge shouldn't be lost,' she says. 'People should recognise every plant and know what it's for. "Our medicine is our food," they used to say in ancient times.' Marianna says animals were another guide to herbs and flowers, as they don't touch toxic plants. Indeed, Kri Kri goats were observed using Crete's endemic *diktamo* to heal their wounds, while other historic accounts refer to wounded goats eating *diktamo* to expel the hunter's arrow. The plant is one of the hardest to find as it can only be collected in gorges and from the rocky tops of mountains where goats can't tread.

While in Maroulas you can enjoy sensational views out to sea from the quirky café **Farmhouse Katerina** (☎ 28310 71627), which has an animal pen attached. If you call in advance they can make you a meal from their own meat (thankfully pre-slaughtered). The taverna **Ofo to Lo** (☎ 28310 71670) also enjoys a lovely setting and has good food.

an early Christian basilica. The 14th-century frescoes are faded but extraordinarily well executed; the oldest are in the choir stalls. Ask at the **kafeneio** (coffeehouse) next door for the key.

Returning to Apostoli continue south along the main road. The next town is **Agia Fotini**, which is a larger town with a supermarket. The road twists and turns along the scenic valley before it comes to **Meronas**, a little village with big plane trees, and a fine Church of the Panagia. The oldest part of the church is the nave, which was built in the 14th century. The southern side of the church with its elegant portal was added under the Venetians. The highlight of the church is the beautifully restored 14th-century frescoes.

The road continues south to **Gerakari**, an area known for its delicious cherries. From Gerakari a new road continues on to Spili.

Near the alluring little village of Patsos is the **Church of Agios Antonios**, in a cave above a picturesque verdant gorge. The cave was an important sanctuary for the Minoans and the Romans, and is still a pilgrimage destination on 17 January. You can take the scenic route along the Spili–Gerakari road, following driveable dirt road to Patsos, where you turn left. The entrance to the gorge is clearly signposted and it is a short walk to the cave. There are lovely spots with picnic tables along the way.

SPILI ΣΠΗΛΙ

pop 698

Spili (*spee-lee*) is a pretty mountain village with cobbled streets, rustic houses and plane trees. Its centrepiece is the unique Venetian fountain in the square that spurts water from 19 lion heads, though its recent refurbishment was ill-advised. Bring along your own water

containers and fill up with the best water on the island.

Spili is no longer an undiscovered hideaway. Tourist buses on their way to the southern coast regularly stop in the town during the day, but in the evening Spili belongs to the locals. It is a great base for exploring the region, as well as being a good spot for lunch. There are two ATMs and a post office on the main street and you can check your email at Fabrica Cafe near the fountain.

Sleeping & Eating

Heracles Rooms (☎/fax 28320 22411; heraclespapadaki@hotmail.com; s/d €29/40; 🚽) Spotless, nicely furnished rooms with insect screens, fridge and great mountain views. Friendly Heracles is keen to impart his knowledge of the area.

Costas Inn (☎ 28320 22040; fax 28320 22043; d incl breakfast €40) These well-kept rooms have satellite TV, radio, ceiling fans and use of a washing machine. Some have a fridge. Breakfast (their own fresh eggs) is downstairs at the taverna.

Yianni's (☎ 28320 22707; mains €4-7) Past the fountain this friendly place has a big courtyard and excellent traditional cooking such as the delicious rabbit in wine, and mountain snails. It also has a decent house red.

Stratidakis (☎ 28320 22006; specials €4.50-6) This place has meat grilling on the spits outside and the specials of the day in pots you can check out in the taverna. There's a lovely balcony out the back.

Panorama (☎ 28320 22555) Pantelis Vasilakis and his wife Calliope run a fine traditional taverna in a picturesque spot on the outskirts of town on the road to Agia Galini, with great views from the terrace. Traditional family recipes and old-style hospitality are the go.

DETOUR: ADELE

For a glimpse of rural life past and present it's worth a visit to **Agreco** (☎ 28310 72129; www.grecotel.gr; admission free but call in advance), which has recreated a 17th-century farm and mini village on a huge estate near the village of Adele, about 13km south east from Rethymno. The working farm prides itself on being a showcase of organic, environment-friendly traditional farming methods and has modern equipment as well as old machinery, including an old donkey-driven olive press, watermill and wine press. You can observe the various activities of the farm – including the making of cheese, bread, raki and wine – as well as wander around the stockyard and garden. The estate is owned by the Daskalantonakis family, who own the Grecotel hotel chain. There is also a **kafeneio** (coffee house) and shop selling traditional products from the farm and the region. You can end your visit with a meal at the excellent taverna overlooking the vineyard, which serves authentic Cretan cuisine using the farm's produce.

The bread is usually homemade, the mezedes excellent and mains include specialities such as kid goat with wild greens. It's an accredited Concreted taverna (p57).

Kambos (☎ 6974 924 833) A lone taverna on the road to Gerakari, about 6km from Spili, an area renowned for its wild tulips and orchids, this no-frills family run place is generally known only by locals. They cook simple, traditional Cretan food from their own meat and vegetables.

Getting There & Away

Spili is on the Rethymno–Agia Galini bus route (see p130), which has six daily services.

MONI ARKADIOU ΜΟΝΗ ΑΡΚΑΔΙΟΥ

This historic 16th-century **monastery** (Arkadi Monastery; ☎ 28310 83136; admission €2; ☎ 9am–7pm Apr–Oct) stands in attractive hill country 23km southeast of Rethymno. The exterior is coldly impressive but the Venetian church inside dates from 1587 and has a richly decorated Renaissance façade with eight slender Corinthian columns topped by an ornate triple-belled tower (it used to feature on the old 100 drachma note).

In November 1866 the Turks sent massive forces to quell insurrections gathering momentum throughout the island. Hundreds of men, women and children who had fled their villages used the monastery as a safe haven. When 2000 Turkish soldiers staged an attack on the building, the Cretans, rather than surrender, set light to a store of gun powder. The explosion killed everyone, Turks included, except for one small girl who lived to a ripe old age in a village nearby. A bust of this woman, and the abbot who lit the gun powder, stand outside the monastery.

To the left of the church there is a small **museum** commemorating the history of the monastery. The striking bare cypress trunk in the courtyard, scorched by the Turkish fire, still has a bullet embedded in its bark. It is worth checking out ossuary in the former windmill outside the museum grounds, which has a macabre collection of skulls and bones of the 1866 fighters.

There are three daily buses from Rethymno to the monastery (€2.40, 30 minutes).

ELEFTHERNA ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΝΑ

The site of ancient Eleftherna, 25km south-east of Rethymno, is perched on a spectacular

location between two gorges. Eleftherna was built by the Dorians in the 8th century BC and became an important settlement. Much of the area is still being excavated by Greek archaeologists, who recommenced excavations in 1985 (the British abandoned theirs in 1929).

You can approach Eleftherna from Arkadi Monastery or from Margarites. At the fountain, signs point you to the **Acropolis**, which is past the car park at the newer Akropolis taverna (leave the car there) and the remains of a **tower**. A path leads you down to the vast **Roman cisterns** carved into the hills, which are eerie to explore. You can see the new excavations in the valley below. A **necropolis** which yielded evidence of human sacrifice has also been uncovered nearby in the area known as Orthi Petra, along with a **Hellenistic bridge** to the north.

The new excavations of the **ancient town** are best reached by driving back to the main road towards Margarites and following the dirt road to the site. The Hellenistic and Roman ruins are currently fenced off, but you can get a glimpse. The site is expected to be made more visitor-friendly.

MARGARITES ΜΑΡΓΑΡΙΤΕΣ

pop 330

Known for its fine pottery, this tiny town is invaded by tour buses in the morning but by the afternoon all is calm. Then you can enjoy wonderful views over the valley from the taverna terraces on the main square, dominated by giant eucalyptus trees.

The town has only one road, which runs through town to the town square, where the bus stops. There is no bank, post office or travel agency, but you'll find more than 20 ceramic studios on and around the main street. The pottery is of mixed quality and taste, but if you skip the garish pieces that line the main street, there are some authentic local designs and quality pieces at a few places. Septuagenarian potter **Manolis Syragopoulos** (☎ 28340 92363) comes from a long line of potters and is the only one left to use manual wheels and a wood-fired kiln – to make pottery the way his great grandfather did. His traditional workshop is about 1km outside the town on your left.

The finer pieces in town can be found at Konstantinos Gallios' excellent studio **Ceramic Art** (☎ 28340 92304) in a lane at the far end of

town, and the slick **Kerameion** (☎ 28340 92135) on the main street, where George Dalamvelas is happy to explain the techniques and history of the town. Dalamvelas uses largely local clay and has many pieces based on Minoan designs. The traditional potters use local clay, collected from about 4km away at the foot of Mt Psiloritis. The clay is of such fine quality it needs only one firing and no glazing – the outside being smoothed with a pebble. You will see many pieces bearing the special flower motif of the area.

Sleeping & Eating

Kouriton House (☎ 28340 55828; www.kouritonhouse.gr; r incl breakfast €45–100) Just outside Margarites in Tzanakiana, this beautifully restored 1750 mansion is a protected historic monument. Philologist Anastasia Friganaki is keen to show guests around the area's natural and historic attractions, and demonstrate traditional methods of making honey, picking herbs and greens, and cooking Cretan and Minoan cuisine.

Mandalos (☎ 28340 92294) On the shady main square with lovely views, this well-regarded taverna and *kafeneio* is a good place to stop for lunch.

Getting There & Away

There are two buses daily from Rethymno Monday to Friday (€3, 30 minutes).

PERAMA TO ANOGIA

The province of Mylopotamos has some of the more dramatic scenery in northern Crete. The hilly interior contains a scattering of villages and farming towns that are just beginning to attract some tourism. The roads leading southeast from the small commercial centre of **Perama** to Anogia pass through a series of cosy villages and bustling market towns along the foothills of Mt Psiloritis.

From Perama, take the northeast turn-off to the **Melidoni cave** (☎ 28340 22650; admission €3; ☎ 9am–6pm Mar–Oct) also known as Gerontospilios. More than 300 villagers took refuge from the Turkish army in the cave in 1824. When the villagers refused to emerge, the Turks threw burning materials through a hole in the top of the cave and asphyxiated everyone. After paying your respects to the martyrs at a monument in the Heroes Room, you can wander through chambers filled with several stalactites and stalagmites.

Continuing east turn left towards the pretty village of **Garazo**, which has a couple of tavernas and a post office. On the way, there is a turn-off at the village of Moutzana for **Episkopi**, a charming tiny village that was once the bishopric under Venetian rule. The town has many stone houses, including several well-preserved Venetian mansions that are being restored and turned into private museums. There are some frescoes still evident in the ruins of the 15th-century **Church of Episkopi** and a Venetian **water fountain** at the end of the town next to the bridge.

From Episkopi you can continue southeast on a scenic route that takes you past the area's largest town, **Zoniana**. In this region everyone seems to be dressed in black and drives a pick-up truck.

Look for signs to the **Sfandoni Cave** (☎ 28340 61734; www.zoniana.gr; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Nov, 10am–3pm weekends Dec–Mar), arguably the most spectacular cave on the island. Stalactites, stalagmites and strange rock formations make for an eerie experience. The front of the cave was a hideout for Greek fighters against the Turks, but most of the large cave (3000 sq metres) was undisturbed and is still not accessible to visitors. You can walk a fair way into a cave, however, through a series of walkways, but it's still important to watch your step as it can be slippery. The lighting changes colour, illuminating various parts of the cave. You normally have to enter the cave in groups with a guide.

At Zoniana you can visit the quirky **Potamianos Wax Museum** (☎ 28340 61087; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am–sunset), Crete's answer to Madame Tussaud's. It has 103 wax dummies of Crete's historic figures in some impressive recreations of historic moments, including a secret school and macabre execution scenes. The private collection was created over 25 years by septuagenarian Dionysis Potamianos and his wife. The road continues to the village of **Axos**, which has the kind of lazy Cretan ambience that has made it a popular stop for tour buses. During the day the village is quiet, but at night the tavernas with open-air terraces host 'Cretan folklore evenings' for tourists.

ANOGIA ΑΝΩΓΕΙΑ

pop 2125

If ever there was a village in Crete that embodies the quintessential elements that make up the 'real' Crete, it is Anogia, a bucolic village perched on the flanks of Mt Psiloritis.

Anogia is well known for its rebellious spirit and its determination to hang on to its undiluted Cretan character. It's a macho town where the *kafeneia* on the main square are frequented by moustachioed men, the older ones often wearing traditional dress (baggy pants and headdress), the younger ones driving mean-looking 4WD utilities (pick-ups). The women stay behind the scenes or flog the traditional crafts that hang all over the shops in town.

Anogia is also known for its stirring music, and the town has spawned a disproportionate number of Crete's best-known musicians (see p49), including the legendary Nikos Xylouris (the house in the main square where he was born is a mini-shrine; its quasi *kafeneio* is run by his sister).

During WWII Anogia was a centre of resistance to the Germans, who massacred all the men in the village in retaliation for their role in sheltering Allied troops and aiding in the kidnap of General Kreipe. The black shirts men still wear today are to demonstrate their mourning.

Today, Anogia is the centre of a prosperous sheep husbandry industry and a burgeoning tourist trade, bolstered as much by curious Greeks as by foreign travellers seeking a Crete away from the hype of the coastal resorts. You may still come across a spontaneous, lively *mandinades* (traditional Cretan rhyming songs) session in one of the tavernas or cafés, particularly during the sheep-shearing season in July, accompanied by copious amounts of raki. Pistol shots often ring into the night air.

Behind the main square of the lower village is the small **Grilios museum** (☎ 28340 31593) with quirky sculptures in stone and wood by local Alkiviadis Skoulas. It is run by his son

Yiorgos, who is known to hold impromptu *lyra* performances. Knock next door or ask at the square if it's not open.

Orientation & Information

The town is spread out on a hillside with the textile shops in the lower half and most accommodation and businesses in the upper half, so getting around involves some steep climbing. There's an ATM and post office in the upper village.

Infocost (☎ 28340 31808; per hr €3; ☎ 5pm-late) in the upper village has internet access.

Festivals & Events

Most weekends there is usually some event (official or not) taking place in Anogia.

A **wedding** in Anogia often involves the entire village (see boxed text, opposite). In late July, the town hosts cultural events and concerts as well as the **Yakinthia Festival** (www.yakinthia.com), organised by the musician Lou-dovikos ton Anogion, which includes open-air concerts at a site on the slopes of Mt Psiloritis. Look around for posters in Anogia from mid-July onwards, or check online for details.

Sleeping & Eating

Kitros (☎ 28340 31429; d €25) This is the only accommodation in the lower village. Rooms are reasonably priced but share a bathroom between two rooms. It is above the taverna (grills €4-7), which does a presentable job of dishes like *gigandes* (lima beans), or baked lamb and potatoes. The homemade wine and raki is good too.

Rooms Aris (☎ 28340 314817; d €30) Aris enjoys perhaps the best views in Anogia. Rooms are clean and cosy and all have new bathrooms. It is next door to the Aristeia.

BACK TO THE FARM

Agrotourism is picking up in Crete, and Axos' **Enagron** (☎ 28340 61611; www.enagron.gr; studios & apt €78-130) is a fine example of the new school of classy rural developments. Enagron is part of the trend towards year-round ecotourism. This farm and accommodation complex hosts occasional cooking seminars on Cretan cuisine and local produce, and allows guests to participate in cooking and any aspect of its agricultural and productive life, from raki and cheese-making classes with the local shepherd to picking wild greens. It's hardly roughing it – there is a pool in the middle overlooking the mountains, comfortable traditionally furnished stone-built studios with fireplaces, a lovely taverna serving its own organic produce, and a communal area with antiques and a country-estate feel. It also runs guided walks and horse or donkey rides in the surrounding countryside. Accommodation is 20% cheaper in summer.

You can visit the farm and eat at the restaurant by booking ahead.

A CRETAN AFFAIR

Anogia is famous for its wild and extravagant wedding celebrations, which traditionally take place in the village squares – 2000 guests are not uncommon and most of the village joins in. Family and friends gather to accompany the groom with a musical procession through the village to the bride's house.

The staccato rattle of a machine gun, or the crack of pistols fired into the air signal the start of the groom's walk (moves to ban this practice have met with mixed success). At the bride's house, the groom's party is met with more machine gun fusillades. The combined parties then make their way to the church for the ceremony, after which the party starts in one of the village squares (or taverna). There is copious food – mostly chunks of lamb and watermelon – and an obscene amount of drink, and then the music and dancing begins and continues until dawn. If the event is being held in the square, they don't mind visitors discretely joining the festivities. Don't join the dancing unless you are invited as each song is normally paid for by the group dancing so others don't cut in. Ask around if you are in Anogia on a weekend; you might just score an invite to a most memorable event. Otherwise just follow the pick-up trucks carting piles of meat, and the sound of gunfire.

Hotel Aristeia (☎ 28340 31459; d incl breakfast €40) In the upper village, the friendly Aristeia enjoys good views and cool breezes in simple but well-outfitted rooms with TV, private bathrooms and balconies. The owner also runs the excellent modern studios next door.

Ta Skalomata (☎ 28340 31316; grills €4-8) This, the oldest restaurant in town, provides a wide variety of grills and Cretan dishes at very reasonable prices. Zucchini with cheese and aubergine is very tasty, as is the home-baked bread. The restaurant is on the eastern side of the upper village and enjoys great views.

Aetos (☎ 28340 31262; grills €5-8.50) This popular taverna in the upper village has a giant charcoal grill cooking meat out the front and fantastic mountain views out the back. It is traditionally furnished and has good Cretan cooking. A regional special is *ofto*, a flame-cooked lamb or goat. Aetos also serves the local mainstay – spaghetti cooked in stock with cheese.

The capacious **Delina** (☎ 28340 31701) is owned and occasionally patronised by renowned Cretan *lyra* player Vasilis Skoulas but is better suited to big functions than intimate dining. It is next to the new **Delina Mountain resort** (www.delina.biz), a swanky year-round retreat with indoor pool, sauna and *hammam*, about 2km along the road to the Nida Plateau.

If the square in the lower village is a bit intimidating for a coffee stop, head further up to the lovely shady square next to Agios Yiorgos church, where you must try the divine sheep's milk ice cream and *galaktoboureko* (custard pastries) at **Skandali Zaharoplasteio** (☎ 28340 31236).

Getting There & Away

There are four buses daily from Iraklio (see p158; €3.40, one hour), and two buses daily Monday to Friday from Rethymno (€4.50, 1¼ hours).

MT PSILORITIS ΟΡΟΣ ΨΕΙΛΑΟΡΤΗΣ

Imposing Mt Psiloritis, also known as Mt Idi, at 2456m is the highest mountain in Crete. At the eastern base of Mt Psiloritis is the **Nida Plateau**, a wide expanse used for sheep grazing that lies between a circle of imposing mountains. The winding, 22km paved road leading up to the plateau from Anogia is carpeted with wild flowers in the early spring and you'll notice many *mitata* (round stone shepherd's huts) along the way (beware, some are guarded by dogs).

The surreal space-age domed structures on a lunar-like landscape you will spot to the east is the **Skinakas Observatory**, the country's most significant star-gazing vantage point, at height of 1750m. It is possible to drive up to the site for spectacular views, but the nocturnal astronomers don't appreciate daytime visitors. The observatory does, however, open to the public once a month during the full moon from May to September, between 5pm and 11pm (English-speaking guides in July and August only). Check the website (www.skinakas.org.gr).

Psiloritis' important feature is the **Ideon Andron Cave** – the place where, according to legend, the god Zeus was reared. The cave may have been inhabited in the early Neolithic period. It is accessible to visitors but its attraction is

more historical, as it is one huge and relatively featureless cavern, strewn with old timber and disused rail tracks.

THE SOUTH COAST

As you near the coast from Spili the scenery becomes more dramatic and takes in marvellous views of the Libyan sea. Heading west then south towards the coast at Plakias you will pass through the dramatic **Kourtaliotis Gorge** through which the river Megalopotamos rumbles on its way to the sea at **Preveli Beach**. North of Plakias is the spectacular **Kotsifou Gorge**.

PLAKIAS ΠΛΑΚΙΑΣ

pop 186

Plakias is one of the liveliest resort towns on the southern coast. The well run youth hostel helps attract a younger crowd than many of the resorts nearby. The mid-size hotels and *domatia* in town attract a mix of package and independent travellers. Off-season it attracts many families and an older crowd.

Plakias has some decent eating options, good regional walks, a large sandy beach and enough activities and nightlife to keep you entertained. It is also a good base from which to explore the region, with a number of excellent beaches nearby.

Orientation & Information

It's easy to find your way around. The main street skirts the beach and another runs par-

allel one block back. The bus stop is at the middle of the waterfront.

Plakias has two ATMs, while **Monza Travel Agency** (☎ 28320 31882), near the bus stop, arranges car and bike hire and excursions. The post office is on the street off Monza Travel. You can check mail at **Frame** (☎ 28320 31522; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-late) above the supermarket or at the **Youth Hostel Plakias** (☎ 28320 32118; per hr €3.60).

Activities

There are well-worn **walking paths** to the scenic village of Sellia, the Moni Finika, Lefkogia, and a lovely walk along the spectacular Kourtaliotis Gorge to Moni Preveli. An easy 30-minute uphill path to Myrthios begins just before the youth hostel.

For guided walking tours, including a walk to Preveli beach that gets you back by boat (€30), contact **Anso Travel** (☎ 28320 31712; www.anso.travel.com). You can arrange to go horse riding through the **Alianthos Beach Hotel** (☎ 28320 31196), which also offers pony rides for children.

There are a several diving operators in town. One of the first was **Kalypso Rocks' Palace Diving Centre** (☎ 28320 31895; www.kalypsodivingcenter.com), which has an impressive dive base nearby offering a range of scuba diving and snorkelling activities. Another well-respected operation is **Phoenix Diving Club** (☎ 28320 31206; www.scubacrete.com).

For **boat trips** (return €12) to Preveli try the fisherman owner of Tasomanolis taverna (right).

Avid readers will appreciate the **Plakias Lending Library** (☎ 9.30am-12.30pm Sun, Mon & Wed, 5-7.30pm

Tue, Thu & Sat), just past the Youth Hostel, which has amassed an excellent collection of books, videos and DVDs in several languages.

Sleeping

Most accommodation is signposted on communal wooden sign boards on the main road. Check www.plakias-filoxenia.gr for additional hotel information.

Camping Apollonia (☎ 28320 31318; per adult/tent €5.50/3.50; ☎) On the right of the main approach road to Plakias, the site is shaded, but rather scruffy and run down.

Youth Hostel Plakias (☎ 28320 32118; www.yhplakias.com; dm €9; ☎) For independent travellers this is *the* place to stay in Plakias. British manager Chris has created a friendly place with spotless dorms, refurbished toilets and showers, green lawns, a shady porch, volleyball court and Internet access. The atmosphere is helped along by Chris' eclectic music collection. It's a 10-minute signposted walk from the bus stop.

Castello (☎/fax 28320 31112; r/studio €30/33; ☎ ☎) It is the relaxed owner Christos and his leafy and shady garden that makes this place a happy haven. All rooms are cool, clean and fridge-equipped and most have cooking facilities and big shady balconies. There are also big two-bedroom apartments ideal for families (€45 to €55). Air-con is an extra €5.

Paligremnos Studios (☎ 28320 31835; www.paligremnos.com; r €35-40; ☎ ☎) At far eastern end of the beach, these family-run studios are dated but are a decent budget option. They have kitchenettes and some have great sea views from the balconies. There is an attached shady taverna.

Pension Thetis (☎ 28320 31430; thetisstudios@gmail.com; studios €45-70; ☎ ☎) This is a very pleasant and clean family-oriented set of studios. The refurbished rooms have fridge, basic cooking facilities, coffee maker and satellite TV. Relax in the cool and shady garden where there is a small playground for kids.

Alianthos Garden Hotel (☎ 28320 31280; www.alianthos.gr; d incl breakfast €70; ☎ ☎) This modern hotel is at the entrance to town next to the road overlooking the sea. It's comfortably furnished in traditional Cretan style.

Eating

The waterfront restaurants that tout picture menus are generally mediocre.

Taverna Christos (☎ 28320 31472; specials €5-11) This established waterfront taverna has a ro-

mantic tamarisk-shaded terrace overlooking the sea. It has a good choice of Cretan dishes and fresh fish and a daily specials board.

Lisseos (☎ 28320 31479; dishes €5.30-8.50; ☎) from 7pm) The location below the road near the bridge is uninspiring, but this place is well known for specialising in *mayirefta* – the best home-style cooking in town.

Tasomanolis (☎ 28320 31129; mixed fish for 2 €16.50) This traditional fish taverna on the western end of the beach is run by a keen fisherman. You can sample his catch on a pleasant terrace overlooking the beach, grilled and accompanied with wild greens and wine.

our pick **Iliomanolis** (☎ 28320 51053; mains €4-6) It's worth the drive through the spectacular Kotsifou Gorge to eat hearty home-style Cretan food at in the village of Kanevos, in a lovely setting with the gorge on one side and a forest on the other. This place is renowned for its excellent food, and owner Maria is happy to show you the tempting array of food in the kitchen (between 20 and 25 dishes each day). The meat is mostly their own produce and they sell their own wine, olive oil and raki.

A popular and cheap *souvlaki* place frequented by the hostel crowd is **Nikos Souvlaki** (☎ 28320 31921), but locals reliably swear by the souvlaki and grills at **To Xehoristo** (☎ 28320 31214). Also recommended are **Sifis** (☎ 28320 31001) for grills and **Siroko** (☎ 28320 32055) just past Tasomanolis.

Entertainment

Plakias has a good nightlife scene in the summer. Travellers tend to gravitate to a couple of key hang-outs, including the excellent beach bar in the middle of the beach. The younger hostel crowd congregate at Ostraco, while Finikas is also popular.

Getting There & Away

In summer there are six buses a day to Rethymno (€3.50, one hour). It's possible to get to Agia Galini from Plakias by catching a Rethymno bus to the Koxare junction (referred to as Bale on timetables) and waiting for a bus to Agia Galini. Plakias has good bus connections in summer, but virtually none in winter. The bus stop has a timetable.

Getting Around

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

HIKING ON MT PSILORITIS

From the Nida Plateau you can join the east-west E4 trail for the ascent to the summit of Psiloritis known as **Timios Stavros** (Holy Cross). The return hike to the summit can be done in about seven hours from Nida. While you don't need to be an alpine mountaineer, it is a long slog and the views from the summit may be marred by heat haze or cloud cover. Shortly after leaving Nida a spur track leads to **Ideon Andron Cave**, with an altitude of 1495m. Along the way to the summit a number of *mitata* provide occasional sheltering opportunities should the weather turn inclement, while at the summit of Psiloritis itself is a twin-domed, small dry-stone chapel.

An alternative access or exit route begins (or ends) at **Fourfours** on the edge of the Amari Valley and a further 3½-hour hike to the west from the summit. There is a mountain refuge about halfway along this trail. From Fourfours you can find onward transport, or continue to follow the E4 to **Spili**. A third access/exit route from the mountain runs to the south and meets the village of **Kamares** (five hours). Halfway along this track you will pass the **Kamares cave**, in which a large collection of painted Minoan urns was found, and which is a popular day hike in its own right for visitors to the southern side of Psiloritis.

The best map for walking in this region is the Anavasi 1:25,000 map of Psiloritis (Mt Ida) (see p215).

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

AROUND PLAKIAS

Myrthios Μύρθιος

pop 208

This pleasant village perched on a hillside above Plakias is an alternative to staying in Plakias. It is within easy reach of the beach and action if you have a car (it's about 20 minutes from Plakias on foot) and enjoys some spectacular views over Plakias Bay.

Niki's Studios & Rooms (☎ 28320 31593; r/studio/tr €25/30/40; 🚻) has basic comfortable rooms, plus studios with kitchenette, fridge and air-con.

our pick Anna Apartments (☎ 6973 324 775; www.annaview.com; d studios €39-55; 🚻) boasts attractive and spacious studios and apartments that are perfect for longer stays. They have big balconies, full-size kitchens, and are more comfortable and homey than the norm.

Stefanos Village (☎ 28320 32252; www.plakias.com; studio/apt from €68/88; 🚻), on the outskirts of the village, is an excellent midrange option, with an enticing horizon pool with panoramic views. The family-run three-level complex has self-catering studios and apartments with spacious balconies and sea views. Most have fully equipped kitchens.

our pick Plateia (☎ 28320 31560; mains €5.50-9), better known as Friderikos' (after the friendly owner), has good views from the stone-built courtyard and excellent food that appeals to a more discerning local palate. Pork fricassee served with potatoes is a good bet, along with a drop of the house wine.

Moni Preveli Μονή Πρέβελι

The well-maintained **Moni Preveli** (☎ 28320 31246; www.preveli.org; admission €2.50; 🕒 8am-7pm mid-Mar-May, 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Jun-Oct) stands in splendid isolation high above the Libyan sea. On the way up there is a prominent war memorial on the cliffs with statues of a gun-toting priest and a Commonwealth soldier. From the car park outside the monastery, there's a lookout with a stunning panoramic view over the southern coast.

The origins of the monastery are unclear because most historical documents were lost in the many attacks inflicted upon it over the centuries. The year '1701' is carved on the monastery fountain but it may have been founded much earlier. Like most of Crete's

DETOUR: ASOMATOS

On the road to Plakias and Preveli, in the village of **Asomatos**, is the fascinating private **Museum of Papa Mihalis Georgoulakis** (☎ 28320 31674; www.plakias.net; admission €2.50; 🕒 10am-3pm). The octogenarian priest has amassed an extraordinary collection of ecclesiastical and historical artefacts, memorabilia, weapons, letters and posters from the Cretan resistance, icons and household items. It is displayed in a quirky, cluttered house in the middle of the village, which has a charming internal courtyard and a small café where you can buy the family's raki and oil.

monasteries, it played a significant role in the islanders' rebellion against Turkish rule. It became a centre of resistance during 1866, causing the Turks to set fire to it and destroy surrounding crops. After the Battle of Crete in WWII, many Allied soldiers were sheltered here before their evacuation to Egypt. In retaliation, the Germans plundered the monastery.

The monastery's **museum** contains a candelabra presented by grateful British soldiers after the war. Built in 1836, the church is worth a visit for its excellent collection of more than 100 icons, some dating back to the early 17th century. There are several fine works by the monk Mihail Prevelis, including a wonderful icon screen containing a gaily painted *Adam and Eve in Paradise* in the middle of the altar.

About 1km before the monastery, a road leads downhill to a large car park (€2) from where a steep foot track leads you 425 steps down to Preveli Beach.

From June through August there are four buses daily from Rethymno to Moni Preveli (€3.90, 1¼hr).

Preveli Beach Παραλία Πρέβελι

Known officially as Paralia Finikodasous (Palm Beach), Preveli Beach, at the mouth of the Kourtaliotis Gorge, is one of Crete's most photographed and popular beaches. The river Megalopotamos meets the back end of the beach before it conveniently loops around its assorted bathers and empties into the Libyan sea. It's fringed with oleander bushes and palm trees and used to be popular with freelance campers before that simple pleasure

was officially outlawed. The beach is mainly sand, has some natural shade at either end – although umbrellas and loungers can be hired – and enjoys cool and clean protected water that is ideal for swimming and diving. There are a couple of seasonal snack bars.

Walk up the palm-lined banks of the river and you'll come to cold, freshwater pools ideal for a swim. There are also pedal boats for hire.

A steep path leads down to the beach from a car park about 1km before Moni Preveli. Alternatively, you can drive to within several hundred metres of the beach by following a signposted, 5km-long, drivable dirt road from a stone bridge just off the Moni Preveli main road, where it's worthwhile stop for lunch or refreshments at **Gefyra** (☎ 69367 04126). The road ends at Amoudi beach, from where you can walk 500m west over the headland and you're home. You can also get to Preveli Beach from Plakias by boat from June through August or by taxi boat from Agia Galini.

Beaches Around Plakias

Between Plakias and Preveli Beach there are several secluded coves popular with freelance campers and nudists. **Damnoni Beach** is pleasant out of high season, despite being dominated by the giant Hapimag tourist complex.

To the west is **Souda**, a quiet beach with some rooms and a couple of tavernas. Continuing west via the village of Sellia and **Rodakino** are the low-key beach settlements of **Polyrizos-Koraka** (also known as Rodakino) with only a handful of tavernas and a few small hotels scattered along a pleasant stretch of beach. It's ideal if you want a quiet beach to chill out at for a few days.

Panorama (☎ 28320 32179; d €30-40; 🚻), at the far western end of Rodakino beach, has decent, budget rooms with a view built on a rise above the beach, behind the thatched-roof taverna. The best rooms are the newer self-catering studios, with tasteful tiles floors, well-stocked kitchenettes, double beds, reading lights and new furniture.

AGIOS PAVLOS & TRIOPETRA

ΑΓΙΟΣ ΠΑΥΛΟΣ & ΤΡΙΟΠΕΤΡΑ

It's not surprising that the fabulous remote sandy beaches of Agios Pavlos and Triopetra have been chosen for yoga retreats (see p211). These unspoilt and peaceful beaches surrounded by sand dunes and rugged cliffs are

arguably one of the most beautiful and serene stretches of unspoilt coastline in Crete.

Agios Pavlos claims to be the location from where Icarus and Daedalus took their historic flight in ancient mythology, although nearby Agia Galini makes the same claim.

Agios Pavlos is little more than a few rooms and tavernas around a small picturesque cove with a sandy beach. There are some stunning rock formations in the cliffs leading to the first of three spectacular sandy coves (about a 10-minute walk, then it gets tougher). The sand dunes reach all the way to the top, which is stunning but can get a bit nasty on very windy days. The furthest coves are the least busy, although there are a few thatched umbrellas and lounges scattered around for your comfort.

Triopetra, named after the three giant rocks jutting out of the sea just off the coast, can be reached from Agios Pavlos (about 300m is drivable dirt road) or via a 12km windy asphalt road from the village of Akoumia, on the Rethymno-Agia Galini road. Just past Akoumia there is the Byzantine church of **Metamorphosis tou Sotira**, which has fine frescoes dating from 1389.

There is also an asphalt road leading to **Agia Irini beach**, via the village of Kerames.

While the roads to these beaches were sealed a few years ago – and were being extended to Ligres, with plans to go as far as Preveli in future – they have so far not been spoilt by overdevelopment. There is no public transport to any of these beaches.

Sleeping & Eating

Agios Pavlos Hotel & Taverna (☎ 28320 71104; www.agiospavloshotel.gr; Agia Irini; d €30-40) A family-run place on Agia Irini beach with simple rooms in the main building. It has small balconies overlooking the sea, as well as rooms under the shady terrace below the taverna (*mayirefta* €4.50 to €7), which has good Cretan food. The café-bar next door is the place for breakfast and drinks, and has internet facilities. The same family also has large self-contained studios at the Kavos Melissa complex (r €45) further up on the cliff.

Yiorgiali Taverna & Rooms (☎ 6974 559 119; Triopetra; d/tr €35/40; 🚻) Right on the Triopetra's long beach is this place run by two brothers, with their mother cooking in the kitchen. The rooms are a recent addition, with marble floors and bathrooms, attractive timber furniture, fridge, TV and balconies.

Pavlos Taverna Pension (☎/fax 28310 25189; www.triopetra.com.gr; d/tr/q €30/35/45) For real isolation, this *pension* on the smaller eastern beach at Triopetra has decent rooms with small kitchens and great sea views behind the taverna, which serves local meat and fresh fish and lobster (that Pavlos, the owner, normally catches) and home-grown organic produce.

Another isolated option is the **Ligres Beach Taverna** (☎ 6972 524 425), a small family-run place with simple rooms next to a stunning beach. It's signposted from Kerames village.

AGIA GALINI ΑΓΙΑ ΓΑΛΙΝΗ

pop 855

Agia Galini (a-ya ga-lee-nee) is another erst-while picturesque fishing village where tourism and overdevelopment has spoilt much of the original charm. Agia Galini was once a port of the ancient settlement of Sybritos.

Hemmed in against the sea by large sandstone cliffs and phalanxes of hotels and *domatia*, Agia Galini can be rather claustrophobic. It is probably the most touristy southern beach resort, though inoffensive compared to the north coast. While it still gets lively during peak season, and has a great atmosphere at night, it has become a more sedate resort attracting a middle-aged crowd and families. It's a convenient base to visit Phaestos and Agia Triada, and although the town beach is crowded there are boats to better beaches.

Orientation & Information

You can get information at www.agia-galini.com. The bus station is at the top of the approach road. The post office is just past the bus stop. There are ATMs and travel agencies with currency exchange. Many cafés have internet access, including **Hoi Polloi** (☎ 28320 91102; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-late), and there is a **laundry** (☎ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm) in the street opposite the post office.

Tours

Near the port, **Cretan Holidays** (☎ 28320 91241) can assist with accommodation and offers a range of bus tours including Knossos (€42); a western Crete tour that includes Hania, Rethymno and Arkadi (€45); Samaria Gorge (€44); and a tour of villages and farms where you sample local cuisine (€45). It also has day-long boat trips to Agiofarango, including lunch (€44).

Sleeping

There is no shortage of places to stay in Agia Galini, but a large percentage of the accommodation is pre-booked by tour operators in peak season.

Adonis (☎ 28320 91333; www.agia-galini.com; r €50-120; ☎) This pleasant hotel is spread over several buildings but the rooms, studios and apartments all have use of the large pool. Rooms are light and clean and most have been refurbished. Some have balconies with sea views.

Stohos Rooms & Taverna (☎ 28320 91433; d incl breakfast €40-45; ☎) On the main beach, with apartments upstairs with kitchenettes and big balconies, and huge studios downstairs which are ideal for families or groups. Friendly Fanourios presides over the excellent taverna downstairs. Try the *kleftiko* or other clay-oven dishes (€8.50).

Erofilii Hotel (☎ 28320 91319; hotelerofilii@hotmail.com; d incl breakfast €30-40; ☎) Run by the laid-back Miro and his turtle mascot, this pleasant 10-room hotel has more character than most. There are plain rooms and some with air-con, fridge and TV. All have great sea views and the lower rooms have a garden terrace. It's signposted to the right off the main road. Miro runs the music bar Yamas.

Hotel Rea (☎/fax 28320 91390; www.hotel-rea.messara.de; s/d €30/35; ☎) On the main road near the port, this budget hotel is dated but has clean, reasonably sized twin and double rooms with pine furniture. The bathrooms are basic but the front rooms have balconies with sea views.

Agapitos Rooms (☎ 28320 91164; d/tr/q €30/35/40; ☎) They don't have a view but these homely studios halfway down the hill are reasonable value, with balconies and back porches, and some have new bathrooms.

Agia Galini Camping (☎ 28320 91386; sites per person €6, tents €4) Next to the beach, 2.5km east of the town, this well-run camping ground is signposted off the Iraklio-Agia Galini road. It's well shaded and has a pool, restaurant and mini-market.

Eating

Madame Hortense (☎ 28320 91351; Greek dishes €4.50-13) The most atmospheric and elegant restaurant in town is on the top floor of the three-level Zorbas complex enjoying great views of the harbour. Cuisine is Greek Mediterranean, and they do steaks (€12).

La Strada (☎ 28320 91053; pizzas €5.50-7.50, pastas €5-6) On the first street left of the bus station, this place has excellent pizzas, pastas and risottos.

Faros (☎ 28320 91346; fish dishes €7-11) Inland from the harbour, this no-frills place is one of the oldest fish tavernas in town, dishing up reasonably priced fresh fish (€45 per kg) as well as a range of grills and *mayirefia*.

Kostas (☎ 28320 91323; fish dishes €6-27) Right on the beach at the eastern end, this established fish taverna decked out in classic blue and white is known for its excellent fresh fish and seafood and is always packed with locals. There's a big range of mezedes and pricey but excellent seafood.

Also recommended are Romantika, at the eastern end of the beach and Stohos Taverna (see opposite). The Petrino *ouzeri* in town has an authentic atmosphere and fine mezedes.

Getting There & Away

BUS

In peak season there are six buses each day to Iraklio (€7.10, two hours), six to Rethymno (€5.30, 1½ hours) and five to Phaestos and Matala (€2.80, 40 to 45 minutes).

TAXI BOAT

In summer there are daily boats from the harbour to the beaches of Agios Giorgios, Agiofarango and Preveli Beach, with fares ranging from €10 to €20.

Getting Around

Opposite the post office, **Mano's Bike** (☎ 28320 91551) rents out scooters and motorcycles, while **Monza Travel** (☎ 28320 91278) rents out cars and organises bus excursions.

THE NORTHEAST COAST

Once you clear the resort strip, the coastline east of Rethymno is indented and pockmarked with watery caves and isolated coves that are only accessible by boat. The chief resorts along the north coast are Bali and Panormo.

PANORMO ΠΑΝΟΡΜΟ

pop 873

Panormo is one of the lesser-known and relatively unspoilt beach towns on the northern coast. It has a couple of good sandy beaches and is easy to get to from Rethymno. While

the beaches are not always the most pristine, the village does have a relaxed folksy atmosphere and makes for a quieter alternative to the occasionally claustrophobic scene immediately east of Rethymno and at nearby Bali. There are a couple of big hotel complexes to the west of the town, but Panormo itself retains an authentic village feel. In summer, concerts and cultural events are held in the cultural centre in a restored carob factory behind the bus stop.

Panormo was once a busy commercial port for citrus and carob exports. The village was built on the site of an ancient settlement, of which little is known. Coins found here indicate that the village flourished from the 1st to the 9th centuries AD, when it was destroyed by the Saracens. There was once an early Christian basilica, probably built around the 6th century, and there are the ruins of a Genoese castle on the harbour.

Orientation & Information

The bus stop is on the main road outside of town. The post office is one block behind the remains of the castle. There is an ATM in one of the hotels just outside Panormo. A tourist mini-train leaves from the main street for the nearby Melidoni Cave (p135) and the pottery village of Margarites (p134). A well-regarded Cretan cooking course is run from Panormo; see p63 for details.

Further information can be found at www.panormo.com.

Sleeping & Eating

Villa Kynthia (☎ 28340 51102; www.kynthia.gr; d €129-171; ☎) This historic old mansion in the village centre has been lovingly restored and converted into a charming B&B-style hotel decorated with iron beds, antique furnishings and murals. One of the rooms has an elaborate frieze of the *Odyssey*. There is one family-size apartment. The pool and breakfast area are in a beautiful private garden courtyard.

Lucy's Pension (☎ 28340 51212; www.lucy.gr; d/studio €40/45; ☎) Well signposted in the centre of town, the owner Lucy has dated but well-maintained simple rooms with kitchenette and balconies. The top rooms have sea views. She also manages the Castello apartments on the waterfront, which are light-filled, spacious and have TV and small kitchens.

Konaki Studio-Apartments (☎ 28340 51026; www.geocities.com/konakihotel; studios €50; ☎) The garden

and pool of this small complex are nicer than the rooms, but this friendly hotel is one of the more pleasant options. It's up above the beach on the northern side of town.

To Steki tou Sifaka (☎ 28340 51230; mains €5-7.50) This cosy taverna-cum-ouzerie is on a paved street a block back from the waterfront. It has good home-style Cretan food. Pick from the specials board out front.

Angira (☎ 28340 51022; grills €5.50-8) A giant anchor on the eastern end of the harbour points you to this respected seaside fish taverna, which serves fresh locally caught fish and seafood, as well as the usual grills and Cretan specialities.

You could also try **Captains' House** (☎ 28340 51352) on the western end of the port for fresh fish, or the faux castle **Taverna Kastro** (☎ 28340 51362), near the bus stop, which has a pleasant courtyard and good mezedes.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Rethymno go to Panormo every 20 minutes (€2, 25 minutes). Buses from Rethymno to Iraklio stop on the main road just outside of town.

BALI ΠΠΑΛΙ

pop 330

Bali, 38km east of Rethymno and 51km west of Iraklio, has one of the most stunning settings on the northern coast, with a series of little coves strung along the indented shore, marked by hills, promontories and narrow sandy beaches. But helter-skelter development around the coast has significantly marred the natural beauty of this former fishing hamlet and the narrow beaches are overcrowded and claustrophobic in the summer. Still, it's not a bad place to rent a boat and get the full effect of the dramatic landscape.

The name Bali has nothing to do with its tropical namesake in Indonesia; it means 'honey' in Turkish, as excellent honey was once collected and processed here. In antiquity the place was known as Astali, although no traces of ancient Astali now remain.

Orientation & Information

Bali is a rather spread-out settlement and it is a long and undulating walk from one end to the other – 25 minutes or more. The village is punctuated by a series of coves that are better known by the hotels or taverns that dominate them than by their proper names. So you have the big

Livadi Beach (Paradise), followed by Varkotopo (Kyma) and then the port beach Limani (Bali Beach), now connected to the smaller Limanaki beach. Over the bluff at the northern end is the tiny Karavostasi cove (Evita), reached on foot along a coastal path from the port or a circuitous drive over the cliff tops.

There is an ATM near the coast guard or you can change money in one of the travel agencies or at Racer Rent-a-Car (see opposite), on the left as you enter town.

Behind the port, **Bali Net Cafe** (☎ 28340 94110; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-midnight) has high-speed access, full services and a separate games room. If you don't have your own wheels, you can get around to the different beaches on the mini-train **Bali Express** (one way €2).

Activities

Bali and it is a popular base for divers and has a variety of water sports. Near the port, **Hippocampus Dive Centre** (☎ 28340 94193; www.hippocampus.com; dives incl equipment from €31) is a well-run operation offering a range of beginner's and advanced dives and snorkelling. On the port, **Water Sports Lefteris** (☎ 28340 94102; cat_cruises@yahoo.gr) will rent you a pedal boat or canoe (€8 to €10 an hour), a motorboat (€30 for two hours) or a jet ski (€40 for 15 minutes). Parasailing costs €40 for a 15-minute flight and there are day-long and sunset cruises (€25).

Sleeping

There is little budget accommodation in Bali, with most of it being designed for couples and families on longer holidays, or taken over by package-holiday groups. Bookings are wise in high season.

Sunrise Apartments (☎ 28340 94267; d/apt €40/50; ☎) Right on Evita Beach, the rooms are very clean, pleasant and spacious, with fridge and basic cooking facilities. The owners will pick up guests from Iraklio airport.

Bali Blue Bay (☎ 28340 20111; mooky@otenet.gr; d incl breakfast €50; ☎) This sleek modern hotel has great views over Bali from the rooms and rooftop pool. The rooms are spacious and boast a tasteful, contemporary design and are equipped with TV, fridge and hairdryers.

Apartments Ikonomakis (☎ 28340 94125; d/q €35/65; ☎) This place is centrally located on a quiet street slightly inland from the port, and was recently refurbished. The rooms are comfortable and have kitchenettes.

Sea View Apartments (☎ 28340 94214; d €60; ☎) Around the bluff from the port (or accessed by car from the back road) this pastel-coloured apartment complex has a great waterfront setting. The two-room apartments are spacious and comfortable, thought the décor is uninspiring.

Eating

Taverna Karavostasi (☎ 28340 94267; Greek specials €4.50-6.50) Belonging to Sunrise Apartments, this cosy little eatery 30m back from Evita Beach offers simple home cooking and snacks. Okra with lamb is a popular dish.

Taverna Nest (☎ 28340 94289; grills €5-9) This family taverna just up from the port near the car park is not on the waterfront, but dishes

out home-style cooking and excellent grills on a pleasant vine-covered terrace. They predominantly use their own fresh produce and meat.

Panorama (☎ 28340 94217; mains €5-8.50) With a prime position overlooking the port, this place is popular and specialises in fresh fish and home-style Cretan food. It's one of the oldest and most respected establishments in town.

Getting There & Around

Buses from Rethymno to Iraklio (€5.90) drop you at the main road, from where it is a 2km walk to the port of Bali. For rentals, **Racer Rent-a-Car** (☎ 28340 94149; fax 28340 94249) has an office at the entrance to town and one at the port.

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