

# Crete Κρήτη



Crete is more like a small country than another Greek island. It's not just Greece's largest island, but arguably the most fascinating and diverse.

Crete's remarkable history is evident across the island, from the ruins of Minoan palaces, Venetian fortresses, old mosques and Byzantine monasteries to the cave that is the legendary birthplace of Zeus. The Venetian ports of Hania and Rethymno are two of Greece's most evocative cities.

Crete is renowned for its natural beauty and diverse landscape. Spectacular mountain ranges dotted with caves are sliced by dramatic gorges that spill out to sea. The rugged interior is interspersed with vast plateaus and fertile plains. The east boasts Europe's only palm-tree forest beach and the south coast has some of the most stunning beaches and isolated coves.

Cretans are proud and hospitable people who maintain their culture and customs, particularly their strong musical tradition. Throughout the island you will come across traditional mountain villages and agricultural settlements unaffected by tourism. The young might drive four-wheel-drives but you will still pass shepherds tending their flocks and come across men in traditional dress.

An abundance of fresh produce and the distinct Cretan cuisine – renowned for its life-prolonging qualities – adds an interesting culinary dimension.

Crete has the dubious honour of hosting nearly a quarter of Greece's tourists. Much of the north coast has been commandeered and spoilt by hotels and cheap package tourism, but the island is big enough for independent travellers to venture off and find quiet beach settlements and mountain villages to explore.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Evocative Towns** Discovering one of Greece's most beautiful cities, Hania's Old Town (p485)
- **Minoan Palaces** Opening a window into the magnificent Minoan civilisation at Knossos (p472)
- **History Explored** Inspecting the treasures in Iraklio's archaeological museum (p466)
- **Spectacular Gorges** Hiking through the Samaria Gorge (p493) – the longest in Europe
- **Southern beaches** Relaxing at Preveli (p483) and the spectacular south coast of Rethymno (p476)



■ POPULATION: 540,045

■ AREA: 8335 SQ KM

## HISTORY

Although Crete has been inhabited since Neolithic times (7000–3000 BC), for most people its history begins with the Minoan civilisation. The glories of Crete's Minoan past remained hidden until British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans made his dramatic discoveries at Knossos in the early 1900s. The term 'Minoan' was coined by Evans and derived from the King Minos of Greek mythology. Nobody knows what the Minoans called themselves.

Among the ruins unearthed by Evans were the famous Knossos frescoes. Artistically, the frescoes are superlative; the figures that grace them have a naturalism lacking in contemporary Cycladic figurines, ancient Egyptian artwork (which they resemble in certain respects), and the Archaic sculpture that came later.

What is known is that early in the 3rd millennium BC, an advanced people migrated to Crete and brought with them the art of metallurgy. The Protopalatial period (3400–2100 BC) saw the emergence of a society of unprecedented artistic, engineering and cultural achievement. It was during this time that the famous palace complexes were built at Knossos, Phaestos, Malia and Zakros.

Also during this time, the Minoans began producing their exquisite Kamares pottery (see p467) and silverware, and became a maritime power trading with Egypt and Asia Minor.

Around 1700 BC the complexes were destroyed by an earthquake. Undeterred, the Minoans built bigger and better palaces on the sites of the originals, as well as new settlements in other parts of the island.

Around 1450 BC, when the Minoan civilisation was at its peak, the palaces were mysteriously destroyed again. While there is continued speculation as to the cause of this destruction, the latest theory suggests it was the result of a giant tsunami that followed the massive volcanic eruption on the island of Santorini (Thira). Knossos was the only palace to be salvaged. It was finally destroyed by fire around 1400 BC.

The Mycenaens appeared in Crete during this time, but the Minoan civilisation was a hard act to follow. The war-orientated Dorians, who arrived in Greece around 1100 BC, were pedestrian by comparison. The 5th century BC found Crete, like the rest of the country, divided into city-states. The glorious classical age of mainland Greece had little impact on Crete, and the Persians bypassed the island. It was also ignored by Alexander the Great, so was never part of the Macedonian Empire.

By 67 BC, Crete had fallen to the Romans. The town of Gortyna in the south became the capital of Cyrenaica, a province that included large chunks of North Africa. Crete, along with the rest of Greece, became part of the Byzantine Empire in AD 395. In 1210 Crete was occupied by the Venetians,

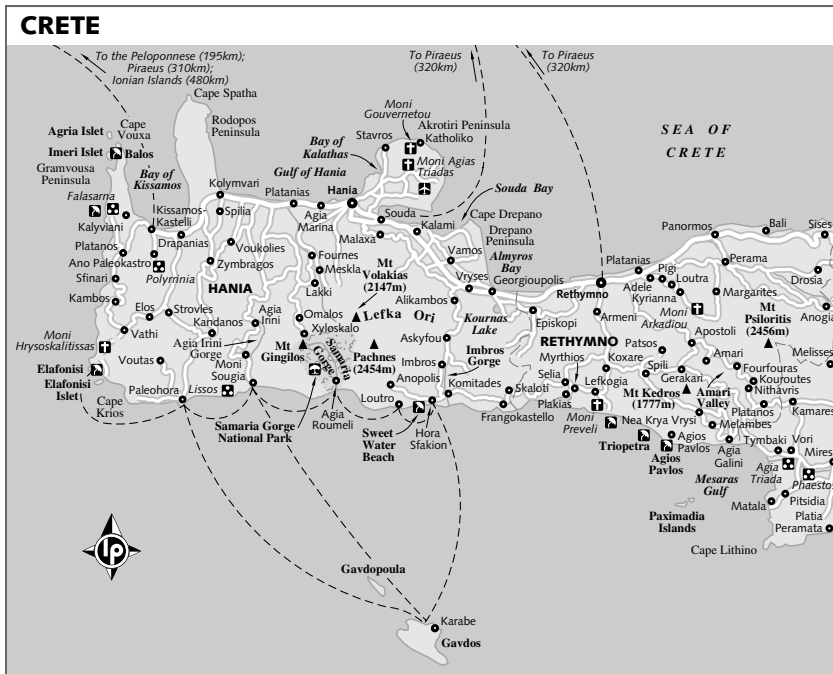
## THE MYSTERIOUS MINOANS

Of the many finds at Knossos and other Minoan sites, it is the celebrated frescoes that have captured the imagination of experts and amateurs alike, shedding light on a civilisation hitherto a mystery. They suggest a society that was powerful, wealthy, joyful and optimistic.

Gracing the frescoes are graceful white-skinned women with elaborately coiffured glossy black locks, dressed in stylish gowns that reveal perfectly shaped breasts. The bronze-skinned men are tall, with tiny waists, narrow hips, broad shoulders and muscular thighs and biceps; the children are slim and lithe. The Minoans seemed to know how to enjoy themselves. They played board games, boxed and wrestled, played leap-frog over bulls and over one another, and performed bold acrobatic feats.

As well as being literate, they were religious, as frescoes and models of people partaking in rituals testify. The Minoans' beliefs, like many other aspects of their society, remain an enigma, but there is sufficient evidence to confirm that they worshipped a nature goddess, often depicted with serpents and lions. Male deities were distinctly secondary.

Women enjoyed a respected position in society, leading religious rituals and participating in games, sports and hunting. Minoan society may have had its dark side, however, with evidence of human sacrifice being practised on at least one occasion, although probably in response to an extreme external threat.



whose legacy is one of mighty fortresses, ornate public buildings and monuments, and handsome dwellings.

Despite the massive Venetian fortifications, which sprang up all over the island, by 1669 the whole of the mainland was under Turkish rule. The first uprising against the Turks was led by Ioannis Daskalogiannis in 1770. Many more insurrections followed, and in 1898 the Great Powers (Great Britain, France and Russia) intervened and made the island a British protectorate. It was not until the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913 that Crete officially became part of Greece, although the island's parliament had declared a de facto union in 1905.

Crete saw much heavy fighting during WWII. Germany wanted the island as an air base and on 20 May 1941 German paratroopers landed on Crete. It was the start of 10 days of fierce fighting that became known as the Battle of Crete. For two whole days the battle hung in the balance until Germany won a bridgehead for its air force at Maleme, located near Hania. The Allied forces of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Greece then

fought a valiant rear-guard action which enabled the British Navy to evacuate 18,000 of the 32,000 Allied troops on the island. The German occupation of Crete lasted until the end of WWII.

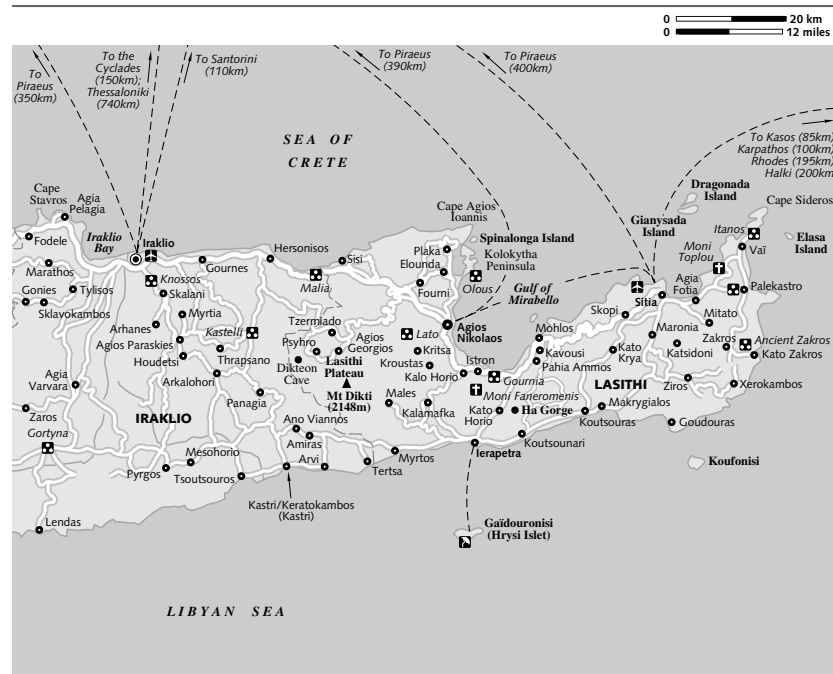
During the war a large and active resistance movement was subject to heavy reprisals from the Germans. Many of Crete's mountain villages were bombed or burnt down and their occupants killed.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section provides an overview of air and boat options to and from the island of Crete. For more comprehensive information, see the relevant sections under specific town entries.

#### Air

Crete has two international airports. The main and biggest one is at Iraklio and there is a smaller one at Hania. Sitia's small domestic airport was expanded but has yet to start operating international charters. All three have flights to Athens and Thessaloniki; Iraklio also has flights to Rhodes.



#### Ferry

Crete has ports at Iraklio, Souda (for Hania), Rethymno, Agios Nikolaos, Sitia and Kissamos. The car price for ferries from Crete to the mainland is about €86.

Ferries may stop at different islands en route and sailing times vary on some routes because of the type of craft used. The following are the main high-season schedules; services are reduced by about half during low season.

#### MAIN FERRY CONNECTIONS TO CRETE

Origin	Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Gythio	Kissamos	7hr	€22.10	5 weekly
Kythira	Kissamos	4hr	€16.40	5 weekly
Piraeus	Agios Nikolaos	12hr	€34	2 weekly
Piraeus	Souda (Hania)	8½hr	€30	2 daily
Piraeus	Souda (Hania)*	4½hr	€51.50	daily
Piraeus	Iraklio	8hr	€32	2 daily
Piraeus	Iraklio	6½hr	€33.50	3 weekly
Piraeus	Rethymno	10hr	€28.70	2 daily
Piraeus	Rethymno*	6hr	€57	daily
Piraeus	Sitia	14½hr	€34	2 weekly
Rhodes	Iraklio	14½hr	€26.40	1 weekly
Rhodes	Agios Nikolaos	12hr	€27	2 weekly
Rhodes	Sitia	10hr	€27	2 weekly
Santorini	Iraklio	4½hr	€16	4 weekly
Santorini	Iraklio*	1¾hr	€31	daily
Thessaloniki	Iraklio	31hr	€46.50	4 weekly

\*high speed services

## CRETE ONLINE

For information on Crete see the websites [www.interkriti.org](http://www.interkriti.org), [www.infocrete.com](http://www.infocrete.com) and [www.explorecrete.com](http://www.explorecrete.com).

## GETTING AROUND

A national highway skirts the north coast from Kissamos in the west to Agios Nikolaos in the east, and is slowly being extended east to Sitia. Buses link the major northern towns from Kissamos to Sitia.

Less-frequent buses operate between the north-coast towns and resorts and the south coast, via the inland mountain villages.

The south coast is spiced by mountains and gorges and many parts have no roads at all. Paleohora and the southwest coastal towns are connected to Hora Sfakion by boat.

## CENTRAL CRETE

Central Crete is occupied by the Iraklio prefecture, named after the island's burgeoning major city and administrative capital, and the Rethymno prefecture, named after its lovely Venetian port town. Iraklio's major attractions are the Minoan sites of Knossos, Malia and Phaestos. The north coast east of Iraklio has been heavily exploited and, consequently, spoiled by package tourism, particularly around Hersonisos and Malia.

Rethymno has resorts spanning the coast to the east and one significant resort to the south, but much of the southern coast is still relatively unspoilt.

## IRAKLIO ΗΠΑΚΛΕΙΟ

pop 130,914

Crete's capital Iraklio (ee-rah-klee-oh), also called Heraklion, is a bustling modern city and the fifth largest in Greece. Hectic, densely populated Iraklio lacks the architectural charm of Hania and Rethymno but is nonetheless a dynamic city. It has a lively city centre, chic boutiques, quality restaurants and buzzing cafés. Continuing redevelopment of the waterfront and new roads are helping to make the city more attractive. The port sees a constant procession of ferries, while charter jets bring thousands of visitors to Crete each year via Iraklio. Nearby the Minoan ruins of Knossos are the major drawcard, while further

inland bucolic vistas of hillsides, full of olive trees and vines, predominate in what is Crete's prime wine-producing region.

## History

The Arabs who ruled Crete from AD 824 to AD 961 were the first to govern from the site of modern Iraklio. It was known then as El Khandak, after the moat that surrounded the town, and was reputedly the slave-trade capital of the eastern Mediterranean.

El Khandak became Khandakos after Byzantine troops finally dislodged the Arabs, and then Candia under the Venetians who ruled the island for more than 400 years. While the Turks quickly overran the Venetian defences at Hania and Rethymno, Candia's fortifications withstood a 21-year siege before finally surrendering in 1669.

Hania became the capital of independent Crete at the end of Turkish rule in 1898, and Candia was renamed Iraklio. Because of its central location, Iraklio became a commercial centre, and resumed its position as the island's administrative centre in 1971.

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

## Orientation

Iraklio has two main squares. Plateia Venizelou, better known as the Lion Square because of its famous landmark Morosini Fountain, is in the heart of the city, while the sprawling Plateia Eleftherias overlooks the harbour.

The pedestrianised streets leading off the Lion Fountain, from Handakos and around Dedalou and Korai are the hub of the city's lively café scene. The ferry port is 500m to the east of the old port. Iraklio's airport is 5km east of the city centre.

## Information

## BOOKSHOPS

**Planet International Bookshop** ☎ 2810 289 605; Handakos 73 Excellent selection of literature, history and travel books, including most books recommended in this guide.

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

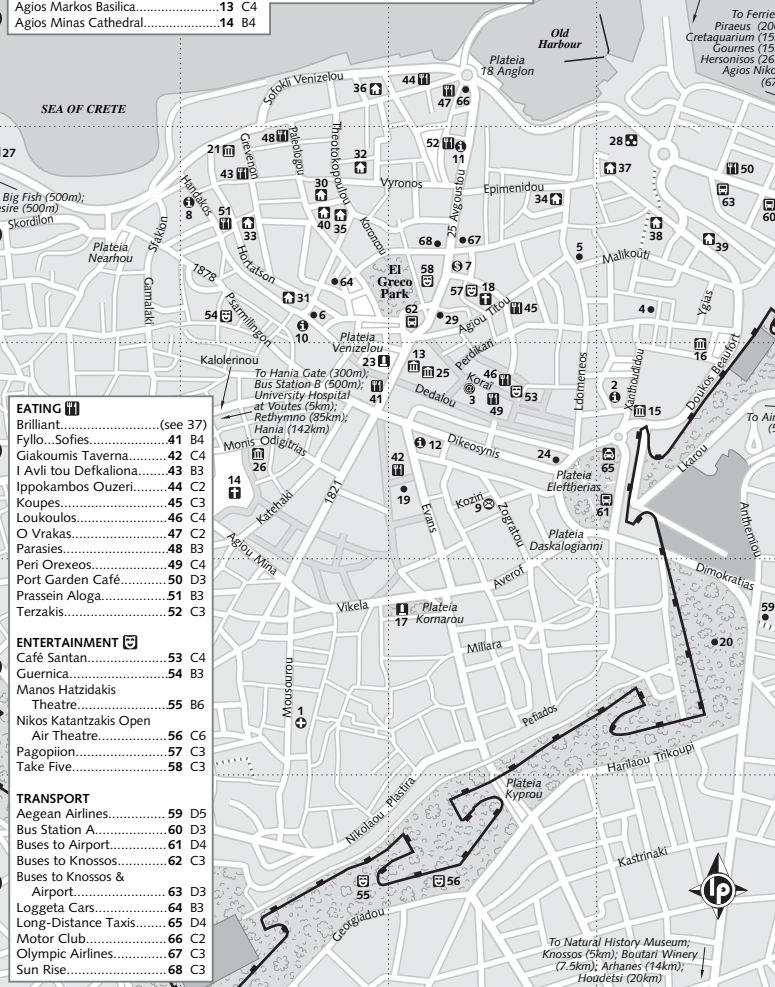
## EMERGENCY

**Tourist Police** ☎ 28102 83190; Dikeosynis 10; ☎ 7am-10pm

## IRAKLIO

0 200 m  
0 0.1 miles

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**INTERNET ACCESS**

**In Spot Internet Cafe** (☎ 28103 00225; Korai 6; per hr €2.40; night rate midnight-noon €1.20; ☎ 24hr) High-speed access; printers, burners and PC games.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

**www.heraklion-city.gr** Useful information and resources.

**LAUNDRY**

Most laundries charge €6 for wash and dry, and offer dry cleaning.

**Inter Laundry** (☎ 28103 43660; Mirabelou 25; ☎ 9am-9pm)

**Laundry Perfect** (☎ 28102 20969; Idomeneos & Malik-outi 32; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat)

**LEFT LUGGAGE**

**Bus Station A Left-Luggage Office** (☎ 28102 46538; per day €2; ☎ 6.30am-8pm)

**Iraklio Airport Luggage Service** (☎ 28103 97349; per day from €2.50-5; ☎ 24hr) Near the local bus stop at the airport.

**Laundry Washalon** (☎ 28102 80858; Handakos 18; per day €3)

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Apollonia Hospital** (☎ 28102 29713; Mousourou) Inside the old walls.

**University Hospital** (☎ 28103 92111) At Voutes, 5km south of Iraklio, it's the city's best-equipped medical facility.

**MONEY**

Most banks and ATMs are on 25 Avgoustou. **National Bank of Greece** (25 Avgoustou 35) Has a 24-hour exchange machine.

**POST**

**Post office** (☎ 28102 34468; Plateia Daskalogianni; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**EOT** (Greek National Tourism Organisation; ☎ 28102 46299; Xanthoudidou 1; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Mar) is opposite the archaeological museum.

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

**Skoutelis Travel** (☎ 28102 80808; www.skoutelistravel.gr; 25 Avgoustou 24) Helpful agent that can make airline and ferry bookings, arrange excursions, accommodation and car hire and has useful ferry information online.

**Sights****ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF IRAKLIO**

This outstanding **archaeological museum** (☎ 28102 79000; Xanthoudidou 2 (temp entry from Hatzidakis); admission €4, incl Knossos €10; ☎ 1-7.30pm Mon, 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 8am-3pm Tue-Sun, noon-3pm Mon late Oct-early Apr) is second in size and importance only to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens because of its unique and extensive Minoan collection. The museum was undergoing a major €21 million restoration, with the revamped museum expected to open in 2009. In the meantime, highlights of the collection are on display in a compact temporary exhibition being housed in another annexe on the site.

The museum's collection covers Cretan civilization from Neolithic times until the Roman empire and includes pottery, jewelry, figurines and sarcophagi, as well as some famous frescoes, mostly from Knossos and Agia Triada. All testify to the remarkable imagination and advanced skills of the Minoans. While the temporary exhibition only includes 400 of the 15,000 artefacts that had been on display in the museum, it is presented to international museum standards and presents the key masterpieces of the collection.

Among the highlights are the famous Minoan frescoes from Knossos, including the **Procession fresco**, the **Griffin Fresco** (from the Throne Room), the **Dolphin Fresco** (from the Queen's Room) and the amazing **Bull-Leaping Fresco**, which depicts a seemingly double-jointed acrobat somersaulting on the back of a charging bull.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The famous elaborate **Kamare pottery**, named after the sacred cave of Kamare where the vases were first discovered is also on display, including a superbly decorated vase from Phaestos with white sculpted flowers.

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

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

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

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

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

**HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF CRETE**

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

Upstairs there is a reconstruction of the **library of author Nikos Kazantzakis**, a **Battle of Crete** section and an outstanding **folklore collection**.

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM**

Established by the University of Crete, this leading **Natural History Museum** (☎ 2810 282 740; www.nhmc.uoc.gr; Leoforos Venizelou; adult/child €3, adults accompanying children free; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun), has relocated to impressive new five-level premises in the restored former electricity building on the waterfront. Only two wings had opened at the time of research, including an impressive interactive discovery centre for kids, compete with labs and excavation projects. Apart from the broader evolution of humankind, it explores the flora and fauna of Crete, the island's ecosystem and habitats, and its caves, coastline and mountains, as well as Minoan life.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

Iraklio burst out of its **city walls** long ago, but these massive fortifications, with seven bastions and four gates, are still very conspicuous, dwarfing the concrete structures of the 20th century. Venetians built the defences between 1462 and 1562. You can follow the walls around the heart of the city for views of Iraklio's neighbourhoods, although it is not a particularly scenic city.

The 16th-century **Koules Venetian fortress** (Iraklio Harbour; admission €2; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), at the end of the Old Harbour's jetty, was called Rocca al Mare under the Venetians. It stopped the Turks for 22 years and then became a Turkish prison for Cretan rebels. The exterior is most impressive with reliefs of the Lion of St Mark. The interior has

26 overly restored rooms and good views from the top. The ground-level rooms are used as art galleries, while music and theatrical events are held in the upper level.

The vaulted arcades of the **Venetian Arsenal** are opposite the fortress.

Several other notable vestiges from Venetian times survive. Most famous is **Morosini Fountain** (Lion Fountain) on Plateia Venizelou, which spurts water from four lions into eight ornate marble troughs. Built in 1628, the fountain was commissioned by Francesco Morosini while he was governor of Crete. Its centerpiece marble statue of Poseidon with his trident was destroyed during the Turkish occupation. Opposite is the three-aisled 13th-century **Agios Markos Basilica**. It has been reconstructed many times and is now the **Municipal Art Gallery** (☎ 28103 99228; 25 Avgoustou; admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri; 9am-1pm Sat). A little north is the attractively reconstructed 17th-century **Venetian Loggia**. It was a Venetian version of a gentleman's club; the male aristocracy came here to drink and gossip. It is now the Town Hall.

The delightful **Bembo Fountain**, at the southern end of 1866, was built by the Venetians in the 16th century. The ornate hexagonal edifice next to the fountain was a pump house added by the Turks, and now functions as a pleasant *kafeneio* (coffee house).

The **Museum of Religious Art** (☎ 28102 88825; Monis Odigitrias; admission €2; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct; 9.30am-3.30pm winter), is housed in the former **Church of Agia Ekaterini** next to **Agios Minas Cathedral**. It has an impressive collection of icons, frescoes and elaborate ecclesiastical vestments, including six icons by Mihail Damaskinos, the mentor of El Greco.

The **Church of Agios Titos** (Agiou Titou) was constructed after the liberation of Crete in AD 961 and was converted to a Catholic church and then a mosque. It has been rebuilt twice after being destroyed by fire and then an earthquake.

The **Battle of Crete Museum** (☎ 28103 46554; nr Doukos Beaufort & Hatzidakis; admission free; ☎ 8am-3pm) chronicles this historic battle.

## Activities

**Cretan Adventures** (☎ 28103 32772; www.cretanadventures.gr; Evans 10, upstairs) is a well-regarded local company run by two intrepid brothers,

who can organise hiking and trekking tours, mountain biking, and a range of specialist and extreme activities.

The **Mountaineering & Skiing Club of Iraklio** (E05; ☎ 28102 27609; www.interkriti.org/orivatikos/orivat.html; Dikeosynis 53; ☎ 8.30-10.30pm) arranges mountain climbing, cross-country walking and skiing excursions across the island most weekends.

## Iraklio for Children

The **Natural History Museum** (p467) is a safe bet for kids, as is an excursion to the **Cretaquarium** (see p471).

If the kids are museumed out, the waterfront **Port Garden Café** (☎ 28102 42411; Paralaki Leoforo; ☎ 7am-late) opposite the Megaron hotel has indoor and shady outdoor play areas, including jumping castles and swings. You can also escape the heat and let the kids run around in **Georgiades Park**, where there is a pleasant shady café.

## Tours

Iraklio's myriad travel agents run coach tours the length and breadth of Crete. Try the helpful **Skoutelis Travel** (☎ 28102 80808; www.skoutelis.gr; 25 Avgoustou 24).

## Festivals & Events

Iraklio's **Summer Arts Festival** takes place at the **Nikos Kazantzakis Open Air Theatre** (☎ 28102 42977; Jesus Bastion; box office ☎ 9am-2.30pm & 6.30-9.30pm), near the moat of the Venetian walls, the nearby **Manos Hatzidakis theatre** and at the Koules fortress. Check www.heraklion-city.gr for the programme or ask at the **Municipal Cultural Office** (☎ 28103 99211; Androgeiou 2; ☎ 8am-4pm) behind the Youth Centre café.

## Sleeping

Iraklio's central accommodation is weighted towards business travellers. Most hotels were upgraded in the lead up to the 2004 Olympics.

## BUDGET

**Hellas Rent Rooms** (☎ 28102 88851; fax 28102 84442; Handakos 24; dm/d/tr without bathroom €10.50/30/42) This friendly and relaxed defacto youth hostel has a reception area and rooftop bar three flights up that's open all day. The rooms have fans and a wash basin and the shared bathrooms are basic but clean, and all rooms have balconies. You can have breakfast on the terrace from €2.50.

**Mirabello Hotel** (☎ 28102 85052; www.mirabello-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 20; s/d without bathroom €35/44, d with bathroom €65; ☎) One of Iraklio's most pleasant budget hotels, the relaxed Mirabello is on a quiet street in the centre. The rooms are immaculate, though some are a little cramped, with TV, phones, balconies and upgraded bathrooms. Some rooms share single-sex bathrooms.

**Hotel Rea** (☎ 28102 23638; www.hotelrea.gr; Kalimeraki 1; d with/without bathroom €44/34) Popular with a wide range of backpackers, the family-run Rea has an easy, friendly atmosphere. Rooms all have fans and sinks, although some bathrooms are shared. There's a small, basic communal kitchen and it has family rooms (€60).

**Hotel Lena** (☎ 28102 23280; www.lena-hotel.gr; Lahana 10; s/d with bathroom €45/60, without bathroom €35/45; ☎) On a quiet street, friendly Hotel Lena has 16 comfortable, airy rooms with phone, TV, fans and double-glazed windows. Most have private bathrooms but even the communal bathrooms are pleasant and upgraded.

## MIDRANGE

**Kronos Hotel** (☎ 28102 82240; www.kronoshotel.gr; Sofokli Venizelou 2; s/d €48/60; ☎) This well-maintained older waterfront hotel has comfortable rooms with double-glazed windows and balconies, phone and TV, and most have a fridge. It is one of the better-value two-star hotels in town. Ask for one of the rooms with sea views.

**Kastro Hotel** (☎ 28102 84185; www.kastro-hotel.gr; Theotokopoulou 22; s incl breakfast from €50, d & tr incl breakfast €75-90; ☎) A refurbished, modern, cheery B-class hotel in the back streets, the Kastro is an excellent choice. The large rooms have fridges, TV, hairdryers, phones and ISDN internet connectivity.

**Irini Hotel** (☎ 28102 29703; www.irini-hotel.com; Idomeneos 4; s/d incl breakfast €71/100; ☎) Close to the old harbour, Irini is a mid-sized establishment with 59 large, airy rooms with TV, radio and telephone, and plants and flowers on the balconies. You can get a lower rate if you skip breakfast.

**Marin Hotel** (☎ 28103 00018; www.marinhotel.gr; Doukos Beaufort 12; s incl breakfast €75, d incl breakfast €95-125; ☎) The front rooms of this refurbished hotel have great views of the harbour and fortress and some have big balconies. Rooms are attractive and well-appointed, and staff are attentive.

**Atrion** (☎ 28102 46000; www.atrion.gr; Hronaki 9; s/d incl breakfast €95/110; ☎) Fully refurbished in 2003, this is now one of the city's more pleasant hotels. Rooms are tastefully decked out in neutral tones, with TV, fridge, hairdryers and data ports. The top rooms have sea views and small balconies.

## TOP END

**Lato Hotel** (☎ 28102 28103; www.lato.gr; Epimenidou 15; s/d €100/127, ste from €175; ☎) This refurbished boutique hotel overlooking the fortress is one of Iraklio's prime hotels, with a smart contemporary design. Most rooms have spectacular views, especially the spacious suites, as does the rooftop restaurant and bar. There's a funky new fine-dining restaurant downstairs, **Brilliant** (☎ 28103 34959).

**Megaron** (☎ 28103 05300; www.gdmmegaron.gr; Doukos Beaufort 9; s/d €190/215, ste from €247; ☎) This once-derelict historic building on the harbour has been stunningly transformed with top design and fittings throughout. There are comfortable beds, Jacuzzis in the VIP suites and plasma-screen TVs. The rooftop restaurant and bar have fine harbour views, along with a unique glass-sided pool.

## Eating

Iraklio has some excellent restaurants to suit all tastes and pockets. Many restaurants are closed on Sunday.

## BUDGET

**Fylo...Sofies** (☎ 28102 84774; Plateia Venizelou 33; bougatsa €2.20; ☎ 5am-late) Next to the Lion Fountain, this place does a roaring morning trade when both tourists off the early boats and the post-club crowd head straight for a delicious *bougatsa* pastry.

**Giakoumis Taverna** (☎ 28102 80277; Theodosaki 5-8; mayirefta €4-6; ☎ closed Sun) There are tavernas clustered around the 1866 market side streets and this is one of the favourites. There's a full menu of Cretan specialities and vegetarian options. Turnover is heavy, which means that the dishes are fresh, while you can see the meat being prepared for the grill.

**O Vrakas** (☎ 69778 93973; Plateia 18 Anglon; seafood mezedhes €4.20-12) This small street-side *ouzerie* (place which serves ouzo and light snacks) grills fresh fish alfresco in front of diners. It's unassuming and the menu is limited, but still very popular with locals. Grilled octopus is a good choice.

**Ippokambos Ouzerie** (☎ 28102 80240; Sofokli Venizelou 3; seafood mezedhes €4.50-9.50) Many locals come to this taverna at the edge of the tourist-driven waterfront dining strip. Take a peek inside at the fresh trays and pots of specialities such as baked cuttlefish.

### MIDRANGE

**Koupes** (☎ 69772 59038; Agiou Titou 22; mezedhes €2.50-6.50) One of a row of *rakadika* (Cretan *ouzeries*) along this pedestrian strip popular with students, this place opposite the school has a good range of mezedhes.

**Terzakis** (☎ 28102 21444; Marinelí 17; mezedhes €3.60-10.20) On a small square opposite the Agios Dimitrios church, this excellent *ouzerie* has a good range of mezedhes, mayirefta and grills. Try the sea urchin salad or, if you are really game to try a local speciality, ask if they have 'unmentionables': *ameletita* (fried sheep testicles).

**I Avli tou Defkaliona** (☎ 28102 44215; Prevelaki 10; meat dishes €6-8.90; ☺ dinner) This traditional taverna with wicker chairs, checked tablecloths and plastic grapevines is known for its delicious food.

**Peri Orexeos** (☎ 28102 22679; Korai 10; mains €7-8) Right on the busy Korai pedestrian strip, this restaurant offers excellent modern Greek food with creative takes like *kataifi*-wrapped creamy chicken, huge salads, and solid Cretan cuisine. There's also a wicked chocolate dessert.

Also recommended is **Parasies** (☎ 28102 25009; Plateia Istorikou Mousiou; grills €5-10) in the corner of the square next to the Historical Museum.

### TOP END

**Prassein Aloga** (☎ 28102 83429; cnr Handakos & Kydonias 21; mains €12-18) This little rustic-style café/restaurant has excellent innovative Mediterranean food from an ever-changing menu, including dishes based on ancient Greek cuisine, such as pork medallions with dried fruit on wild rice.

**Loukoulos** (☎ 28102 24435; Korai 5; mains €15-32) Loukoulos offers fine dining in an elegant setting, with luscious Mediterranean specialities served on fine china and accompanied by soft classical music.

### Entertainment

**Pagopion** (☎ 28103 46028; Plateia Agiou Titou; ☺ 10am-late) This former ice factory is the most original café/bar/restaurant on the island.

**Guernica** (☎ 28102 82988; Apokoronou Kritis 2; ☺ 10am-late) A great combination of traditional décor and contemporary music makes this one of Iraklio's hippest bar/café. The rambling old building has a delightful terrace garden.

**Take Five** (☎ 28102 26564; Akroleondos 7; ☺ 10am-late) An old favourite on El Greco Park, this lively bar has been swamped by new louder arrivals on this recently pedestrianised strip.

**Café Santan** (☎ 69762 85869; Korai 13) This oriental café reflects the latest trend, with shishas, sofas and belly dancing from 11pm.

There are big dance clubs along Leoforos Ikarou, just down from Plateia Eleftherias and along Epimendou, though many close in summer. A new club and entertainment precinct has emerged along the revitalised waterfront to the west of the port, including some flashy open-air clubs. The most popular are **Big Fish** (☎ 28102 88011; Makariou 17 & Venizelou; ☺ all day), housed in a stunningly restored old stone building, and **Desire**, next door.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

**Aegean Airlines** (www.aegeanair.com) City (☎ 2810 344 324; fax 2810 344 330; Leoforos Dimokratias 11); Airport office (☎ 2810 330 475)

**Olympic Airlines** (www.olympicairlines.com) City (☎ 2810 244 824; 25 Avgoustou 27; ☺ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri); Airport office (☎ 2810 337 203, 2810 397 129)

#### Domestic

Olympic and Aegean each have at least five flights daily to Athens (from €75) from Iraklio's Nikos Kazantzakis airport, as well as daily flights to Thessaloniki (from €106). Olympic also flies to Rhodes (from €89). Both airlines have regular special fare deals, although rarely in the summer peak season. Aegean's early-bird internet bookings are excellent value but dates cannot be changed. If you are flying last-minute, Olympic is normally cheaper.

The newcomer **Sky Express** (☎ 2810 223 500; www.skyexpress.gr) has daily flights from Iraklio to Rhodes and Santorini and up to three flights a week to Mytilini, Kos, Samos, Ikaria (from €79), though baggage is restricted to 12.5kg (they are small jets).

#### International

Iraklio has lots of charter flights from all over Europe, with flights to London available from €80 to €150. Skoutelis Travel (p466) is a good

place to ask. **GB Airways** (www.gbairways.com) also has weekly scheduled flights from Gatwick to Iraklio.

Aegean Airlines has direct scheduled flights from Iraklio to Milan, Rome and other European cities.

#### BUS

Iraklio has two intercity bus stations. **Bus Station A** (☎ 28102 46534; www.ktel-heraklio-lassithi.gr), which serves eastern and western Crete (including Knossos), is on the waterfront near the quay, though there were plans to relocate it. **Bus Station B**, (☎ 28102 55965) just beyond Hania Gate, west of the city centre, serves Phaestos, Agia Galini and Matala.

Services reduce on weekends.

The airport bus stops in the centre of town at Plateia Eleftherias.

#### Buses from Bus Station A

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Agia Pelagia	45 min	€3.10	3 daily
Agios Nikolaos	1½ hr	€6.20	half-hourly
Arhanes	30 min	€1.60	hourly
Hania	3 hr	€10.50	18 daily
Hersonisos/Malia	45 min	€3.50	half-hourly
Ierapetra	2½ hr	€9.50	8 daily
Knossos	20 min	€1.15	3 hourly
Lassithi Plateau	2 hr	€4.70	1 daily
Milatos	1½ hr	€4.70	2 daily
Rethymno	1¼ hr	€6.50	18 daily
Sitia	3½ hr	€13.10	5 daily

#### Buses from Bus Station B

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

#### FERRY

**Minoan Lines** (☎ 21041 45700, 28102 29624; www.minoan.gr) operates ferries each way between Iraklio and Piraeus (seven hours). The ferries depart from both Piraeus and Iraklio at 10pm. Fares start at €29 for deck class and €54 for cabins. The Minoan Lines' high-speed boats, the F/B *Festos Palace* and F/B *Knossos Palace*, are much more modern and comfortable than their ANEK rivals.

In summer, Minoan runs extra 6½-hour services (deck class €37) on weekends and some weekdays. This is the most convenient way to get to/from Iraklio.

**GA Ferries** (☎ 28102 22408; www.gafferries.gr) runs four ferries weekly from Iraklio to Thessaloniki (€46.50, 31 hours) via Santorini (€16, 4½ hours), Ios (€18.80, 6½ hours) and Paros (€24.30, 10 hours), stopping at several other islands en route. GA also has a weekly ferry from Iraklio (leaving Fri 5pm) to Rhodes (€26.40, cabin €39.20, 14½ hours,) via Kassos (€19.40, six hours,) and Karpathos (€17.40, eight hours).

**Hellenic Seaways** (www.hellenicseaways.gr) has a daily high-speed service to Santorini (€31, 1¼ hours), Ios (€36.20, 2½ hours), Paros (€47.80, 3¼ hours), Naxos (€41.70, 4¼ hours) and Mykonos (€48.70, 4¾ hours).

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

**LANE Lines** (☎ 28103 46440; www.lane.gr) leaves Iraklio for Sitia, Kasos (€19.50, six hours), Karpathos (€19.50, eight hours), Diafani (€17.90, nine hours), Halki (€18.20, 11 hours) and Rhodes (€27, 14 hours).

**Iraklio Port Authority** (☎ 28102 44912) at the port has ferry schedule information.

### Getting Around

Bus 1 goes to and from the airport every 15 minutes between 6am and 1am. The bus terminal is near the Astoria Capsis Hotel on Plateia Eleftherias. A taxi to the airport costs around €7 to €10. You can call **Ikarus Radio Taxi** (☎ 28102 11212) to arrange a ride.

**Long-Distance Taxis** (☎ 28102 10102) from Plateia Eleftherias, outside the Astoria Capsis Hotel and Bus Station B, can take you to all parts of Crete. Sample fares include Agios Nikolaos (€60), Rethymno (€70) and Hania (€120). The airport has a full range of car-rental companies but you'll likely get the best deal from local outlets. Try:

**Sun Rise** (☎ 28102 21609; 25 Avgoustou 46) Just off the pedestrian street.

**Loggetta Cars** (☎ 28102 89462; www.loggetta.gr; 25 Avgoustou 20)

**Motor Club** (☎ 28102 22408; www.motorclub.gr; Plateia 18 Anglon) Opposite the fortress, has the biggest selection of bikes.

### AROUND IRAKLIO Cretaquarium

The massive **Cretaquarium** (☎ 28103 37788; www.cretaquarium.gr; adult/child€8/6, free admission kids under 4; ☺ 9am-9pm May-mid-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Oct-Apr) at Gournes, 15km east of Iraklio, is the larg-

## WINE COUNTRY

Just south of Iraklio and Knossos is the wine-producing area of Peza, which produces about 70 percent of Crete's wine. The **Pezas Union of local producers** (☎ 2810 741 945; www.pezaunion.gr; admission free) ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) have tastings and videos, as well as a mini-museum. The state-of-the-art **Boutari Winery** (☎ 28107 31617; www.boutari.gr; Skalani; tour & tasting €4.50; ☎ 10am-6pm), about 8km from Iraklio, is set on a hill in the middle of the Fantaxometoho estate and has a stunning tasting room and showroom overlooking the vineyard. Tours include a quirky futuristic video on Crete in an impressive cellar cinema where you watch the hi-tech show with headphones and a glass of wine.

est aquarium in the Eastern Mediterranean region. There are several large tanks with an amazing display of marine life, though it is light on really big fish. There are some interactive multimedia features and displays in several languages.

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

## Arhanes & Houdetsi

The village of Arhanes, 14km south of Iraklio, once boasted one of the island's great Minoan palaces. Today only scraps of the palace (signposted from the main road) remain, but Arhanes is a vibrant village with meticulously restored old houses and pleasant squares with excellent tavernas. It's considered a model of rural town revival.

The **Archaeological Museum of Arhanes** (☎ 28107 52712; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Wed-Mon) has several interesting finds from regional archaeological excavations. The exhibits include *larnakes* (coffins) and musical instruments from Fourni and an ornamental dagger from the Anemospilia temple.

You can find visitor information at [www.arhanes.gr](http://www.arhanes.gr).

**Neraidospilios** (☎ 69727 20879; www.neraidospilios.gr; s/apt €40-70; ☎) These superbly-appointed spacious studios and apartments on the outskirts of the village overlooking the mountains are run by the brothers at the Diahroniko café in town.

South of Arhanes, in the otherwise unremarkable village of **Houdetsi**, the much-lauded musician Ross Daly has established a **museum of musical instruments** (☎ 28107 41027; www.labyrinthmusic.gr; admission €3; ☎ 10am-8pm Mar-Oct) displaying his extensive collection of mostly stringed instruments. The restored stone manor is the base for the Labyrinth Musical Work-

shop which each summer holds concerts with leading international musicians in the lovely grounds.

There are buses hourly from Iraklio to Arhanes (€1.40, ½ hour) and three buses daily to Houdetsi (€2.20, ¾ hour).

## KNOSSOS ΚΝΩΣΟΣ

Knossos (k-nos-os), 5km from Iraklio, was the capital of Minoan Crete and the **Palace of Knossos** (☎ 28102 31940; admission €6; ☎ 8am-7pm Jun-Oct, 8am-3pm Nov-May) is the island's major tourist attraction.

The ruins of Knossos, home of the mythical Minotaur kept by King Minos, were uncovered in the early 1900s by the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans. Heinrich Schliemann, who had uncovered the ancient cities of Troy and Mycenae, had had his eye on the spot but was unable to strike a deal with the landowner.

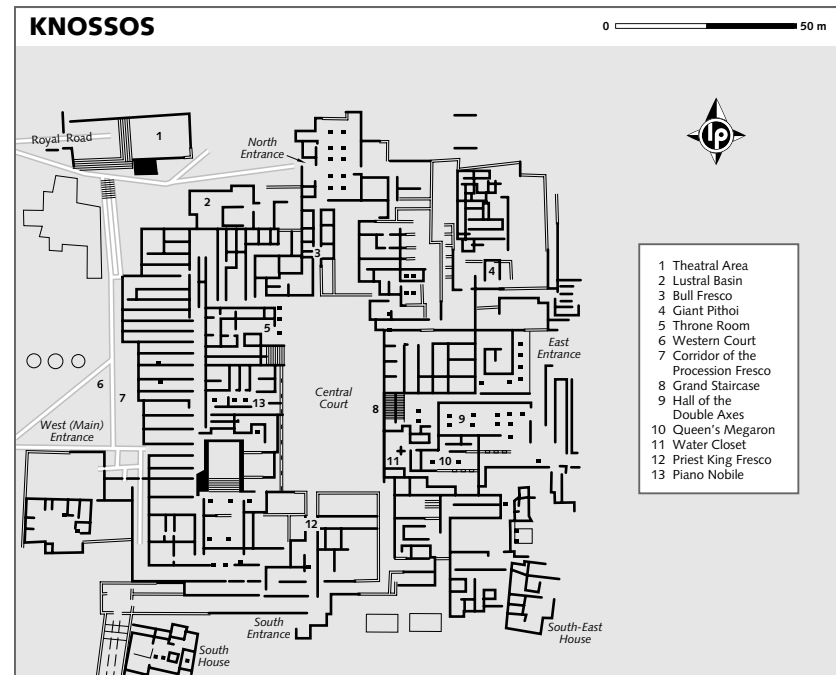
Evans spent 35 years and £250,000 of his own money excavating and reconstructing parts of the palace. Some archaeologists have disparaged Evans' controversial reconstruction, believing he sacrificed accuracy to his overly vivid imagination. However, most non-experts agree that Sir Arthur did a good job and the reconstructions allow you to visualise what a Minoan palace looked like.

You will need to spend some time at Knossos to explore it thoroughly.

## History

The first palace at Knossos was built around 1900 BC. In 1700 BC it was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design. It is this palace that Evans reconstructed. It was partially destroyed again sometime between 1500 and 1450 BC. It was inhabited for another 50 years before it was devastated once and for all by fire.

The city of Knossos consisted of an immense palace, residences of officials and



priests, the homes of ordinary people, and burial grounds. The palace comprised royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasuries and store-rooms, all built around a central court. Like all Minoan palaces, it also doubled as a city hall, accommodating all the bureaucracy.

Until 1997 it was possible to enter the royal apartments, but the area was cordoned off before it disappeared altogether under the continual pounding of tourists' feet. Extensive repairs are under way but it is unlikely to open to the public again.

## Exploring the Site

Thanks to Evans' reconstruction, the most significant parts of the complex are instantly recognisable (if not instantly found), such as his reconstructed columns, most painted deep brown-red with gold-trimmed black capitals. Like all Minoan columns, they taper at the bottom.

It is not only the vibrant frescoes and mighty columns that impress at Knossos. Notice the little details which are evidence of a highly sophisticated society – the drainage

system, the placement of light wells, and the relationship of rooms to passages, porches, light wells and verandas, which kept rooms cool in summer and warm in winter.

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

If you leave the Corridor of the Procession Fresco and walk straight ahead to enter the site from the northern end, you will come to the **Theatral Area**, a series of steps that could have been a theatre or the place where people gathered to welcome important visitors arriving by the Royal Road.

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

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

Also in the northern section of the palace are the **Giant Pithoi**, large ceramic jars used for storing olive oil, wine and grain. Evans found over 100 *pithoi* at Knossos, some 2m high. The ropes used to move them inspired the raised patterns decorating the jars.

Once you have reached the Central Court, which in Minoan times was surrounded by the high walls of the palace, you can begin exploring the most important rooms of the complex.

From the northern end of the west side of the Central Court, steps lead down to the **Throne Room**. This room is fenced off but you can still get a pretty good view of it. The centrepiece, a simple, beautifully proportioned throne, is flanked by the **Griffin Fresco**. (Griffins were mythical beasts regarded as sacred by the Minoans.) The room is thought to have been a shrine, and the throne the seat of a high priestess, rather than a king. The Minoans did not worship their deities in great temples but in small shrines, and each palace had several.

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

Returning to the Central Court, the impressive **Grand Staircase** leads from the middle of the eastern side of the palace to the royal apartments, which Evans called the **Domestic Quarter**. This section of the site is now cordoned off and is off limits to visitors. Within the royal apartments is the **Hall of the Double Axes**. This was the king's megaron, a spacious double room in which the ruler both slept and carried out certain court duties. The room had a light well at one end and a balcony at the other to ensure air circulation. The room takes its name from the double axe marks on its light well, the sacred symbol of the Minoans.

A passage leads from the Hall of the Double Axes to the **Queen's Megaron**. Above the door is a copy of the **Dolphin Fresco**, one of the most exquisite Minoan artworks, and a blue floral design decorates the portal. Next to this room is the queen's bathroom, complete with terracotta bathtub and **water closet**, touted as the

first ever to work on the flush principle; water was poured down by hand.

### Getting There & Away

Regular buses run from Iraklio (see p471) from the bus station and from outside the Lion Fountain. From the coastal road there are occasional signs directing you to Knossos. Beware of touts trying to usher you into private paid-parking areas. There are several free car parks closer to the site.

### MALIA ΜΑΛΙΑ

The Minoan **Palace of Malia** (☎ 28970 31597; admission €4; 🕒 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), 3km east of the resort of Malia, is the only cultural diversion on the northern stretch of coast east of Iraklio, which otherwise has surrendered lock, stock and barrel to the package-tourist industry. Malia is smaller than Knossos and Phaestos and consisted of a palace complex and a town built on a flat, fertile plain, not on a hill.

Entrance to the ruins is from the **West Court**. At the extreme southern end of this court there are eight circular pits which archaeologists think were used to store grain. To the east of the pits is the main entrance to the palace, which leads to the southern end of the **Central Court**. At the southwest corner of this court you will find the **Kernos Stone**, a disc with 34 holes around its edge. Archaeologists still don't know what it was used for.

The **Central Staircase** is at the north end of the west side of the palace. The **Loggia**, just north of the staircase, is where religious ceremonies took place.

The exhibition hall has reconstructions of the site and interesting photos, including aerial shots. There is a good beach nearby.

There are buses to Malia from Iraklio every 30 minutes (€3.50, one hour).

### ZAROS ΖΑΡΟΣ

pop 2215

About 46km southwest of Iraklio, Zaros is a refreshingly unspoilt village that's known for its spring water and bottling plant. Various excavations in the region indicate that the Minoans and the Romans settled here, lured by the abundant supply of fresh water.

If you have your own wheels, the Byzantine monasteries and traditional villages tucked away in the hills are worth exploring. **Moni Agiou Nikolaou**, which is at the mouth of the verdant **Rouvas Gorge**, contains some 14th-century

paintings. A few kilometres later, the **Moni Agiou Andoniou Vrondisiou** is noteworthy for its 15th-century Venetian fountain and early 14th-century frescoes.

Just outside the village, the lovely shady park at **Votomos** makes a great picnic stop, with a small lake, excellent taverna and café **I Limni** (☎ 28940 31338; trout per kg €22; 🕒 9am-late) and a children's playground. From the lake, there is a walking path to Moni Agiou Nikolaou monastery (900m) and Rouvas Gorge (2.5km).

In the village, the charming **Studios Keramos** (☎ /fax 28940 31352; s/d incl breakfast €30/35; 🕒) is decorated with Cretan crafts, weaving and family heirlooms, antique beds and furniture. Owner Katerina is up early cooking up a copious traditional Cretan breakfast – don't miss it.

On the main street, the excellent taverna, **Vengera** (☎ 28940 31730), is run by vivacious Vivi and her mother Irini who cook honest traditional Cretan food.

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

### GORTYNA ΓΟΡΤΥΝΑ

Conveniently, Crete's three other major archaeological sites lie close to each other forming a rough triangle some 50km south of Iraklio. It's best to visit them all together.

Lying 46km southwest of Iraklio and 15km from Phaestos, on the plain of Mesara, is **Gortyna** (☎ 28920 31144; admission €4; 🕒 8am-7.30pm, to 5pm winter), pronounced *gor-tih-nah*. It's a vast and wonderfully intriguing site with bits and pieces from various ages. The site was a settlement from Minoan to Christian times. In Roman times, Gortyna was the capital of the province of Cyrenaica.

The most significant find at the site was the massive stone tablets inscribed with the **Laws of Gortyna**, dating from the 5th century BC and dealing with just about every imaginable offence. The tablets are on display at the site.

The 6th-century **Basilica** is dedicated to Agios Titos, a protégé of St Paul and the first bishop of Crete.

Other ruins at Gortyna include the 2nd-century-AD **Praetorium**, which was the residence of the governor of the province, a **Nymphaeum**, and the **Temple of Pythian Apollo**. The ruins are on both sides of the main Iraklio-Phaestos road.

### PHAESTOS ΦΑΙΣΤΟΣ

The Minoan site of **Phaestos** (☎ 28920 42315; admission €4/2, incl Agia Triada €6; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Jun-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Apr), 63km from Iraklio, is all of Minoan Crete. Of all the Minoan sites, Phaestos (*fes-tos*) has the most awe-inspiring location, with all-embracing views of the Mesara Plain and Mt Ida. The layout of the palace is identical to Knossos, with rooms arranged around a central court, though there has been no reconstruction.

In contrast to Knossos, the palace at Phaestos has very few frescoes. It seems the palace walls were mostly covered with a layer of white gypsum. Like the other palatial-period complexes, there was an old palace here that was destroyed at the end of the Middle Minoan period. Unlike the other sites, parts of this old palace have been excavated and its ruins are partially superimposed upon the new palace.

The entrance to the new palace is by the 15m-wide **Grand Staircase**. The stairs lead to the west side of the **Central Court**. The best-preserved parts of the palace complex are the reception rooms and private apartments to the north of the Central Court; excavations continue here. This section was entered by an imposing portal with half columns at either side, the lower parts of which are still *in situ*. Unlike the Minoan freestanding columns, these do not taper at the base. The celebrated Phaestos disc was found in a building to the north of the palace. The disc is now in Iraklio's archaeological museum (p466).

### Getting There & Away

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

### AGIA TRIADA ΑΓΙΑ ΤΡΙΑΔΑ

Pronounced *ah-ye-ah trih-ah-dha*, the small Minoan site of **Agia Triada** (☎ 28920 91564; admission €3, incl Phaestos €6; 🕒 10am-4.30pm summer, 8.30am-3pm winter), 3km west of Phaestos, was smaller than the other royal palaces but built to a similar design. This, and the opulence of the objects found at the site, indicate that it was a royal residence, possibly a summer palace of Phaestos' rulers. To the north of the palace is a small town where remains



of a *stoa* (long, colonnaded building) have been unearthed.

Finds from the palace, now in Iraklio's archaeological museum, include a sarcophagus, two superlative frescoes and three vases: the Harvester Vase, Boxer Vase and Chieftain Cup.

The road to Agia Triada takes off to the right, about 500m from Phaestos on the road to Matala. There is no public transport to the site.

## MATALA MATAAA

pop 100

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

Matala expanded to the point where much of its original appeal was lost and these days it is a struggling resort, though it still has its loyal returnees and is a popular stop for day-trippers and tour buses every summer. The beautiful sandy **beach** below the caves is one of Crete's best and the resort is a convenient base to visit Phaestos and Agia Triada. The caves are normally fenced off at night but there was no guard or entry charge at research time.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Fantastic Rooms to Rent** (☎ 28920 45362, fax 28920 45292; s/d/tr €20/25/25, d & tr with kitchen €30; 🍴) Has been here since the hippie heydays, and has added a newer block at the back. The rooms are plain but comfortable, many with kitchenette, phone, kettle and fridge.

**Pension Andonios** (☎ 28920 45123, fax 28920 45690; d/tr €25/30) Run by the genial Antonis, this comfortable pension has attractively furnished rooms set around a lovely courtyard, many with kitchenette, and the top rooms have balconies.

**Hotel Zafiria** (☎ 28920 45366, fax 28920 45725; d incl breakfast €40; 🍴 📺 🚿) The sprawling Zafiria has comfortable rooms with balconies, sea views and telephones and a new pool beneath the cliffs.

Eating in Matala is hardly an experience in *haute cuisine*. Overlooking the beach, **Lions** (☎ 28920 45108; specials €6-9) has been popular for many years and the food is better than average, with big trays of home-style dishes inside. It is also a good place for a drink, as it gets lively in the evening.

**Gianni's Taverna** (☎ 28920 45719; mains €5-7) is a no-frills place with good-value grills.

## Getting There & Away

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

## VORI ΒΟΡΠΟΙ

pop 755

In the village of Vori, 4km east of Tymbaki past Phaestos, you will find the outstanding private **Museum of Cretan Ethnology** (☎ 28920 91112; admission €3; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, by appointment in winter ☎ 28920 91110). The modern museum provides a fascinating insight into traditional Cretan culture, with exhibits following themes such as rural life, war, customs, architecture, music, and the herbs, flora and fauna that form the basis of the Cretan diet. There are some beautiful weavings, furniture, wood-carvings and musical instruments. It's well signposted from the main road.

## RETHYMNO ΡΕΘΥΜΝΟ

pop 27,868

Rethymno (*reth-im-no*) is Crete's third-largest town and one of the most picturesque, with a charming harbour and massive Venetian fortress. The delightful Venetian-Ottoman quarter is a maze of narrow streets, graceful wood-balconied houses and ornate Venetian monuments, with minarets adding a touch of the Orient. The city has a campus of the University of Crete, bringing a student population that keeps the town alive outside the tourist season. An added attraction is a beach right in town.

The approaches to the town couldn't be less inviting. The modern town has sprawled out along the coast, dotted with big package hotels along the stretch on the sandy beach to the east.

## History

The site of Rethymno has been occupied since Late Minoan times. In the 3rd and 4th centuries BC, the town was called Rithymna, an

autonomous state of sufficient stature to issue its own coinage. A scarcity of references to the city in Roman and Byzantine times suggest it was of minor importance.

The town thrived under the Venetians, who ruled from 1210 until 1645, when the Turks took over. Turkish forces ruled until 1897, when it was taken by Russia as part of the Great Powers' occupation of Crete.

Rethymno became an artistic and intellectual centre after the arrival of a large number of refugees from Constantinople in 1923.

## Orientation

Rethymno is a fairly compact town with most of the major sights and places to stay and eat near the old Venetian harbour. The beach is on the eastern side, around from the Venetian harbour.

If you arrive by bus, you will be dropped at the rather inconveniently located terminal at the western end of Igoumenou Gavriil, about 600m west of the Porto Guora (although this was due to relocate). If you arrive by ferry, the old quarter is at the end of the quay.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Ilias Spondidakis bookshop** (☎ 28310 54307; Souliou 43) Stocks novels in English, books about Greece, tapes of Greek music and has a small second-hand section.

**Xenos Typos** (☎ 28310 29405; Ethnikis Antistasis 21) Stocks foreign press, guide books and maps.

### EMERGENCY

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

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cybernet** (Kallergi 44-46; per hr €3; 🕒 10am-5am)

### 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; Triandalydou 17; 🕒 24hr)

## MONEY

**Alpha Bank** (Pavlou Koundouriotou 29)  
**National Bank of Greece** (Dimokratias)

## POST

**Post office** (☎ 28310 22302; Moatsou 21; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri)

## 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)

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Ellotia 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 **fortress** (fortezza; ☎ 28310 28101; Paleokastro Hill; admission €3.10; 🕒 8am-8pm Jun-Oct) is 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 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.

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 old clothes, baskets, weavings and farm tools whose purpose would remain obscure without the useful explanatory labels on the exhibits. It is in a lovely historic Venetian building.

Pride of place among the many vestiges of Venetian rule in the old quarter goes to the **Rimondi Fountain** with its spouting lion heads and Corinthian capitals; and the 16th-century **Loggia**, now a museum shop.

At the southern end of Ethnikis Antistaseos is the well-preserved **Porto Guora** (Great Gate), a remnant of the defensive wall.

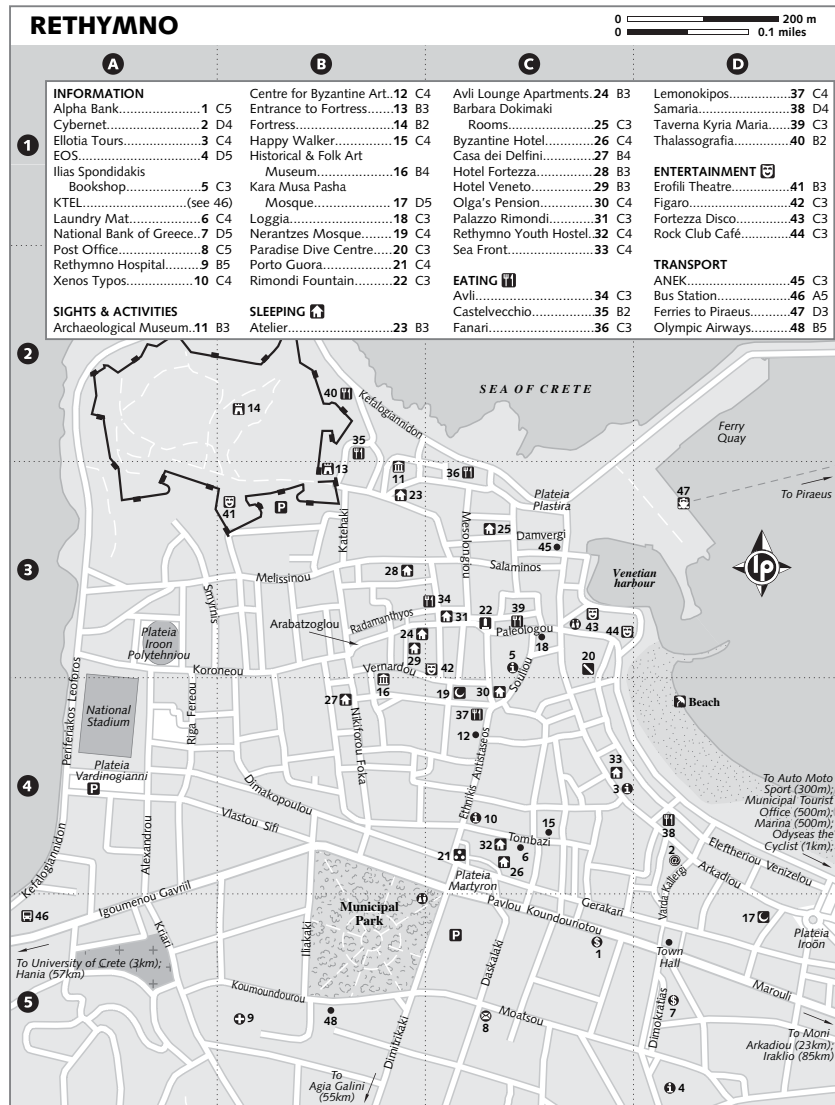
The **Centre for Byzantine Art** (☎ 28210 50120; Ethnikis Antistaseos) is a great example of a restored

Venetian/Turkish mansion and has 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. The building's minaret, built in 1890, was being restored at the time of researching

this book. The building now houses the **Hel- lenic Conservatory** and makes a lovely venue for concerts and recitals.

### Activities

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



Rethymno's chapter of the **EOS** (Greek Alpine Club; ☎ 28310 57766; eos.rethymnon.com; Dimokratias 12) can give advice on mountain climbing in the region.

The **Paradise Dive Centre** (☎ 28310 26317; www.diving-center.gr) runs diving activities and PADI courses for all grades of divers from their dive base at Petres, about 15 minutes west of Rethymno.

**Odyssey the Cyclist** (☎/fax 28310 58178; odysseythe-cyclist@hotmail.com; Velouhioti 31) runs guided rides in the area.

### Festivals & Events

Rethymno's main cultural event is the annual **Renaissance Festival** (☎ 28310 51199; www.cultureguide.gr; 🗓 Jul-Sep), primarily held in the Erofilo Theatre at the fortress. Most years there's a **Wine Festival** in mid-July in the municipal park. There are lively carnival celebrations in February.

### Sleeping

#### BUDGET

**Rethymno Youth Hostel** (☎ 28310 22848; www.yhrethymno.com; Tombazi 41; dm without 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 it is open all year.

**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 connecting a range of basic but colourful rooms. Most have a fridge, TV, fan and basic bathrooms. Rates include breakfast at Stella's kitchen downstairs.

**Atelier** (☎ 28310 24440; atelier@ret.forthnet.gr; Himaras 27; r €35-45) Some of the best-value options are these clean and attractively refurbished rooms attached to Frosso Bora's pottery workshop. They have exposed stone walls and many Venetian architectural features, as well as small flat-screen TVs, new bathrooms and kitchenettes.

**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, fridge and air-con. It also has cheerful studio apartments with sea views and ceiling fans further towards the town beach, and rooms in another building nearby.

**Byzantine Hotel** (☎ 28310 55609; Vosporou 26; d incl breakfast €45) This 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. There's no air-con, though there were plans to install it.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Casa dei Delfini** (☎ 28310 55120; kzaxa@reth.gr; Nikiforou Foka 66-68; studio €45-70, ste €80-140; 🕒 ) Turkish and Venetian architectural features have been cleverly maintained in this elegant pension, including an old stone trough and the hammam 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 Fortezza** (☎ 28310 55551; www.fortezza.gr; Melissinou 16; s/d incl breakfast €57/69; 🕒 ) Housed in a refurbished old building in the heart of the old town, the tasteful rooms have TVs, telephones and air-con. After a day of roaming through Rethymno, it's pleasant to relax by the swimming pool.

**Hotel Veneto** (☎ 28310 56634; www.veneto.gr; Epimenidou 4; studio/ste incl breakfast €112/127; 🕒 ) 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.

**Palazzo Rimondi** (☎ 28310 51829; www.palazzorimondi.com; Xanthoulidou 21 & Trikoupi 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.

**Avli Lounge Apartments** (☎ 28310 58250; www.avli.gr; cnr Xanthoulidou 22 & Radamantinos; ste 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.

### Eating

The waterfront and Venetian harbour are lined with similar tourist restaurants fronted by fast-talking touts. Rethymno's best restaurants are inland from the harbour.

**BUDGET**

**Taverna Kyria Maria** (☎ 28310 29078; Moshovitou 20; Cretan dishes €2.50-6.50) For traditional atmosphere, head inland down the little side streets to Kyria Maria, behind the Rimondi Fountain. This taverna has outdoor seating with bird cages hanging from the leafy trellis.

**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 caserole-style *mayirefta* (ready-cooked meals), the soups and grills are excellent and the fruit and *raki* (Greek fire water, smoother than *tsipouro*) are complimentary.

**MIDRANGE**

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

**Thalassografia** (☎ 28310 52569; Kefalogiannidon 33; mezedhes €3.80-7.30) This excellent *mezedhopoleio* (restaurant specialising in mezedhes), in a breathtaking setting under the *fortezza* with views out to sea, is the place to watch the sunset and try some fine mezedhes. The grilled sardines are excellent, as are the creamy mushrooms.

**Lemonokipos** (☎ 28310 57087; Ethnikis Antistasis 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 good range of vegetarian dishes and lots of tasty appetisers.

**Castelvecchio** (☎ 28310 55163; Himaras 29; mains €7-16; ☹ dinner only Jul-Aug, dinner & lunch 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).

**Avli** (☎ 28310 26213; www.avli.com; cnr Xanthoudidou 22 & Radamanthos; mains €13.50-30) This delightful former Venetian villa is the place for a special night out. The Nuevo-Cretan style food is superb, the wine list excellent and you dine in an idyllic garden courtyard bursting with pots of herbs, bougainvillea canopies, fruit trees and works of art.

**Entertainment**

Rethymno's livelier nightlife is concentrated in the cluster of bars, clubs and discos around Nearhou and Salamino, near the Venetian harbour area as well as the waterfront bars off Plastira Square, which are popular with younger locals. Students frequent the lively *rakadika* on Vernadou.

**Rock Club Cafe** (☎ 28310 31047; Petihaki 8; ☹ 9pm-dawn) One of Rethymno's classic hang-outs, tourists fills the club nightly.

**Fortezza Disco** (Nearhou 20; ☹ 11pm-dawn) Big and flashy with three bars, a laser show and a well-groomed international crowd that starts drifting in around midnight.

**Figaro** (☎ 28310 29431; Vernadou 21; ☎ noon-late) Housed in an ingeniously restored old building, Figaro is an atmospheric 'art and music' all-day bar that attracts a subdued crowd for drinks, snacks and excellent music.

**Getting There & Away**  
**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 seven buses a day to Plakias (€3.50, one hour), six to Agia Galini (€5.30, 1½ hours), three to Moni Arkadiou (€2.40, 30 minutes), two to Omalos (€11.90, two hours) and four to Preveli (€4). There are daily buses to Hora Sfakion via Vryses. Services are greatly reduced in the low season.

**CATAMARAN & FERRY**

**ANEK** (☎ 28310 29221; www.aneq.gr; Arkadiou 250) operates a ferry three times a week between Rethymno and Piraeus (€29, 10 hours), leaving both ports at 8pm. Note that some ferries leave from the port and others from the marina further east.

**NEL LINES** (☎ 28310 24295; www.nel.gr) runs a high-speed service between Rethymno and Piraeus (€57, five hours) daily from July to September (four times a week May to June).

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

**Getting Around**

**Auto Moto Sport** (☎ 28310 24858; www.automotosport.com.gr; Sofokli Venizelou 48) rents cars and has 300

motorbikes, from mopeds and 50cc bikes to a Harley 1200cc.

**AROUND RETHYMNO****Moni Arkadiou** Μονή Αρκαδίου

This historic 16th-century **monastery** (Arkadi; ☎ 28310 83136; admission €2; ☹ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct) stands in attractive hill country 23km southeast of Rethymno. The most impressive building is the Venetian baroque church. Its striking façade has eight slender Corinthian columns and is topped by an ornate triple-belled tower.

In November 1866 the Turks sent massive forces to quell insurrections that were 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, rather than surrender, the Cretans set light to a store of gun powder. The explosion killed everyone, Turks included, except 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 Venetian church is a small **museum**. The ossuary in the former windmill outside the museum grounds 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).

**Margarites** Μαρμαρίτες  
**pop 331**

Known for its pottery tradition, Margarites, 27km from Rethymno, is invaded by tour buses in the morning. There are more than 20 ceramic studios and among the garish pieces that line the main street there are some places with good-quality, authentic local designs. The traditional potters use local clay collected from the foot of Mt Psiloritis, which is of such fine quality it needs only one firing and no glazing – the outside is smoothed with a pebble. You will see many pieces bearing the flower motif of the area.

The most traditional place is the workshop of septuagenarian potter **Manolis Syragopoulos** (☎ 28340 92363) who is the only one still using manual wheels and a wood-fired kiln to make pottery the way his great-grandfather did. It's about 1km outside the town on your left.

Other stand-out places include Konstantinos Gallios' excellent studio **Ceramic Art** (☎ 28340 92304) and the friendly **Kerameion** (☎ 28340 92135) on the main street, which has many pieces based on Minoan designs.

There are wonderful views over the valley from the taverna terraces on the main square.

From Margarites, you can visit **Ancient Eleftherna** with its amazing Roman cisterns.

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

**ANOGIA** ΑΝΩΓΕΙΑ  
**pop 2454**

If ever there was a village that embodies quintessential Crete, it is Anogia, a bucolic village perched on the flanks of **Mt Psiloritis** 37km southwest of Iraklio. Anogia is well known for its rebellious spirit and its determination to hang on to its undiluted Cretan character. Its famous 2000-guest **weddings** involve the entire village. It's also known for its stirring music and has spawned a disproportionate number of Crete's best-known musicians.

Anogia is a macho town where the *kafeneia* (coffee shops) on the main square are frequented by black-shirted moustachioed men, the older ones often wearing traditional dress. The women stay behind the scenes or flog traditional crafts that hang all over the shops in town.

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. 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 glimpse of real Crete.

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. There's an Agricultural Bank with an ATM, and post office in the upper village. You can check mail at **Infocost** (☎ 28340 31808; per hr €3; ☹ 5pm-late) in the upper village.

In the upper village, the friendly **Hotel Aristea** (☎ 28340 31459; incl breakfast €40) has good views from the simple but well-outfitted rooms with TV, private bathrooms and balconies, and there's an excellent set of new studios next door.

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

There are four buses daily from Iraklio (€3.40, one hour), and two buses daily Monday to Friday from Rethymno (€4.70, 1½ hours).

## SPILI ΣΠΗΛΙ

pop 642

Spili (*spee-lee*), 30km southeast of Rethymno is a pretty mountain village with cobbled streets, rustic houses and plane trees. Its centrepiece is a unique Venetian fountain, which spurts water from 19 lion heads, though its recent refurbishment was ill-advised. Bring along your own containers and fill up with the best water on the island. Tourist buses regularly stop in the town during the day, but in the evening Spili belongs to the locals. It is a good spot for lunch and a great base for exploring the region, midway between the north and south coast.

The bus stop is just south of the square. There are two ATMs and the post office on the main street and you can check mail at Café Babis near the fountain.

Friendly **Herades Rooms** (☎/fax 28320 22411; heradespapadakis@hotmail.com; s/d €29/40; 🚽) has spotless, nicely furnished rooms with insect screens, fridge and air-con and great mountain views.

**Costas Inn** (☎ 28320 22040; fax 28320 22043; d incl breakfast €40) has well-kept, pleasant rooms with a homey atmosphere, satellite TV, radio and ceiling fans. Some of the rooms have a fridge.

**Yianni's** (☎ 28320 22707; mains €4-7), past the fountain, is a good dining option with a big courtyard and excellent traditional cooking such as the delicious rabbit in wine, mountain snails and a decent house red.

Pantelis Vasilakis and his wife Calliope run a fine traditional taverna, **Panorama** (☎ 28320 22555), in a picturesque location on the outskirts of town towards Agia Galini. The bread is usually home-made, the mezedhes are excellent and the mains include Cretan specialities such as kid goat with wild greens.

## PLAKIAS ΠΛΑΚΙΑΣ

pop 177

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 medium-size hotels in town attract 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 Plakias. One street skirts the beach and another runs parallel to it 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. Check [www.plakias-filoxenia.gr](http://www.plakias-filoxenia.gr) for hotel information.

You can check mail at **Ostraco Bar** (☎ 28320 31710; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-late) on the main street or at the **Youth Hostel Plakias** (☎ 28320 32118; per hr €3.60).

**Anso Travel** (☎ 28320 31712; [www.ansotravel.com](http://www.ansotravel.com)) runs a range of **guided walking tours** in the area.

### Sleeping

**Youth Hostel Plakias** (☎ 28320 32118; [www.yhplakias.com](http://www.yhplakias.com); dm €9; 🚽) For independent travellers this is *the* place to stay in Plakias. Manager Chris from the UK has created a very friendly place with spotless dorms, green lawns, volleyball court and internet access. He also upgraded the toilets and showers and built a porch. 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 well-tended 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](http://www.paligremnos.com); r €35-40; 🚽) At the 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](mailto:thetisstudios@gmail.com); studio €45-70; 🚽) is a very pleasant and clean family-oriented set of studios. The rooms have fridge, basic cooking facilities, coffee maker and satellite TV. Relax in the cool and leafy garden where there is a small play park for kids.

### Eating

**Lisseos** (☎ 28320 31479; meals €5.30-8.50; ☎ from 7pm) In an uninspiring location below the road near the bridge, Lisseos is nevertheless well-known for the best home-style cooking in town.

**Taverna Christos** (☎ 28320 31472; specials €5-11) An established waterfront taverna, Christos has a romantic tamarisk-shaded terrace overlooking the sea. It has a good choice of Cretan dishes and fresh fish, and an inviting daily specials board.

**O Tasomanolis** (☎ 28320 31129; mixed fish for 2 €16) 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. Top fish are €45. He also takes boat trips (€12 return) to Preveli.

**Nikos Souvlaki** (☎ 28320 31921) is a popular and cheap souvlaki place frequented by the hostel crowd, but locals reliably swear by **To Xehoristo** (☎ 28320 31214) on the main road.

It is worth the drive through the spectacular Kotsifou Gorge to eat hearty home-style Cretan food at **Iliomanolis** (☎ 28320 51053; mains €4-6) in the village of Kanevos. Maria is happy to show you the tempting array of pots in the kitchen (between 20-25 dishes each day).

### Getting There & Away

In summer there are six buses a day from 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. The bus stop has a timetable.

### Getting Around

**Cars Alianthos** (☎ 28320 31851; [www.alianthos.com](http://www.alianthos.com)) is a reliable car-hire outlet.

**Easy Ride** (☎ 28320 20052; [www.easyride.gr](http://www.easyride.gr)), close to the post office, rents out mountain bikes, bicycles, scooters and motorcycles.

## AROUND PLAKIAS

**Moni Preveli** Μονή Πρέβελι  
Standing in splendid isolation above the Libyan Sea, 14km east of Plakias and 35km from Rethymno, is the well-maintained **Moni Preveli** (☎ 28320 31246; [www.preveli.org](http://www.preveli.org); admission €2.50; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Jun-Oct). Like most of Crete's 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 1941, 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.

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

### Preveli Beach

At the mouth of the Kourtaliotis Gorge, Preveli or Palm Beach (Paralia Finikodasous) 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 and empties into the Libyan Sea. The palm-lined banks of the river have freshwater pools ideal for a swim and there are also pedal boats for hire. The beach is fringed with oleander bushes and palm trees.

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, drivable dirt road from a stone bridge just off the Moni Preveli main road. The road ends at Amoudi beach, from where you can walk west along a 500m access track over the headland and you're home.

You can also get there by boat from Plakias or Agia Galini from June through August.

## AGIOS PAVLOS & TRIOPETRA

It's not surprising that the fabulous remote sandy beaches of Agios Pavlos and Triopetra have been chosen by yoga retreats. These unspoiled and peaceful beaches, about 53km

from Rethymno, surrounded by sand dunes and rugged cliffs are arguably one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in Crete.

Agios Pavlos is little more than a few rooms and tavernas around a small cove with a sandy beach, but the best beaches are on the subsequent sandy coves, which are about a 10-minute walk over the cliffs (though you'll get sandblasted on very windy days).

The coves stretch all the way to the three giant rocks rising from the sea that give Triopetra its name. The long stretch of beach beyond can be reached from Agios Pavlos (about 300m is drivable dirt road) or via a 12km-long windy asphalt road from the village of Akoumia, on the Rethymno–Agia Galini road.

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

For real isolation, **Pavlos Taverna Pension** (☎ / fax 28310 25189; www.triopetra.com.gr; d/tr/q €30/35/40; ☺), on the smaller eastern beach in Triopetra, has decent rooms with small kitchens and great sea view balconies. The taverna serves local meat, home-grown organic produce and fresh fish and lobster (which Pavlos normally catches).

There is no public transport to any of these beaches.

## AGIA GALINI ΑΓΙΑ ΓΑΛΙΝΗ

pop 1260

Agia Galini (a-ya ga-lee-nee) is another erst while picturesque fishing village where package tourism and overdevelopment have spoilt much of its original charm. 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 cafes have internet access, including **Hoi Polloi** (☎ 28320 91102; per hr €4; ☺ 9am-late).

## Sleeping

**Agia Galini Camping** (☎ 28320 91386; camp sites per adult/tent €6/4; ☺) Next to the beach, 2.5km east of the town, this well-run camping ground is shaded and has a pool, restaurant and mini-market.

**Hotel Rea** (☎ /fax 28320 91390; http://hote-rea.mes.sara.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.

**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 that are ideal for families or groups. Friendly Fanourios presides over the excellent taverna downstairs. Try the *kleftiko* or other clay-oven dishes (€8.50).

**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.

## 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 it does 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.

**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 always packed with locals. There's a big range of mezedhes and pricey but excellent seafood.

## ALTERNATIVE TOURISM ON CRETE

Crete is far more than a sea-and-sun island destination, and a slow but steady shift towards alternative tourism is offering more responsible and appealing options than the cheap all-inclusive packages in the northern beach resorts. Formerly abandoned mountain villages are being restored to attract year-round rural tourism, agrotourism is quietly on the rise, along with cultural- and gourmet-travel-based programmes and well-run outdoor activities and extreme sports.

One of the ecotourism trailblazers is the isolated mountain settlement of **Milia** (☎ 28220 51569; www.milia.gr). The abandoned stone farmhouses were reconstructed into ecolodges with only solar energy for basic needs and promote a back-to-nature philosophy. You can visit Milia just to dine at the superb taverna, which uses organic produce from its farm (it's after the village of Vlatos via a drivable 3km dirt road), including its own oil, wine, milk and cheese.

Another fine example of classy rural developments is **Enagron** (☎ 28340 61611; www.enagron.gr) in the central mountain village of Axos, where guests are just as likely to be found in the kitchen as they are by the pool, and can participate in agricultural and productive life, from *raki*- or cheese-making with the local shepherds to picking wild greens.

Sustainable tourism and Cretan food is the theme of **Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries** (www.cookingincrete.com), which runs visits to organic farms, wineries and traditional cooking demonstrations in village homes.

Crete has long been a magnet for nature lovers, with endless opportunities for hiking and hard-core trekking, but you can also experience the thrill of parasailing with the griffon vultures and riding through the hills at Avdou (www.hors riding.gr), bungee jumping off the Aradena bridge (www.bungy.gr), climbing up Mt Kofinas (www.korifi.de) or participating in a raft of activities around the island organised by a new generation of local nature enthusiasts (www.cretanadventures.gr).

**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 (per kilogram €45) as well as a range of grills and *mayirefta*.

## Getting There & Away

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).

In summer there are daily boats from the harbour to the beaches of Agios Giorgios, Agiofarango and Preveli Beach (€1 to €20).

## WESTERN CRETE

The westernmost part of Crete comprises the prefecture of Hania, named after the charming old Venetian city that is the region's capital. Its most famous attraction is the spectacular Samaria Gorge. The hinterland is fascinating to explore and the south-coast towns of Paleohora and Sougia are some of the island's most laid-back resorts.

## HANIA XANIA

pop 53,373

Hania (hahn-yah; also spelt Chania) is unreservedly Crete's most evocative city. Its beautiful Venetian quarter is a web of atmospheric streets that tumble onto a magnificent harbour. Restored Venetian townhouses have been converted into chic restaurants and boutique hotels, while ruins house stunning tavernas. The prominent former mosque on the harbour and other remnants of the city's Turkish rulers add to Hania's exotic charm. Hania has a lively tradition of artisanship and boasts some of the island's finest restaurants. The Old Town is a great place to spend a few days.

The Hania Prefecture gets its fair share of package tourists, but most of them stick to the beach developments that stretch out to the west. It is a main transit point for trekkers heading for the Samaria Gorge.

## History

Hania is the site of the Minoan settlement of Kydonia, which was centred on the hill to the east of the harbour. Excavation work continues, but the discovery of clay tablets

with Linear B script has led archaeologists to believe that Kydonia was both a palace site and an important town.

Kydonia met the same fiery fate as most other Minoan settlements in 1450 BC, but soon re-emerged as a force. It was a flourishing city-state during Hellenistic times and continued to prosper under Roman and Byzantine rule.

The Venetians took over at the beginning of the 13th century, and changed the city's name to La Canea. They constructed massive fortifications to deter marauding pirates and invading Turks but they did not prove very effective against the Turks, who took Hania in 1645 after a two-month siege.

The Great Powers made Hania the island capital in 1898 and it remained so until 1971, when the administration was transferred to Iraklio.

Hania was heavily bombed during WWII, but enough of the Old Town survives for it to be regarded as Crete's most beautiful city.

## Orientation

Hania's bus station is on Kydonias, two blocks southwest of Plateia 1866, from where the Old Harbour is a short walk north up Halidon.

Most accommodation is to the left as you face the harbour. The headland separates the Venetian port from the crowded town beach in the modern quarter, called Nea Hora. Koum Kapi is a rejuvenated precinct in the old Turkish quarter further east, lined with waterfront cafés.

Boats to Hania dock at Souda, about 7km southeast of town.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Mediterraneo Bookstore** (☎ 28210 86904; Akti Koundourioti 57) An extensive range of English language novels and books on Crete, as well as international press.  
**Pelekanakis** (☎ 28210 92512; Halidon 98) Has maps, guidebooks and books in 11 languages.

### EMERGENCY

**Tourist police** (☎ 28210 73333; Kydonias 29; ☎ 8am-2.30pm) At the Town Hall.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Triple W** (☎ 28210 93478; Valadinon & Halidon; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr)  
**Vranas Internet** (☎ 28210 58618; Agion Deka 10; per hr €2; ☎ 9.30am-1am)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**www.chania.gr** The Municipality website has information on the city and cultural events.

**www.chania-guide.gr** Has good information on Hania city and prefecture.

## LAUNDRY

**Laundry** (☎ 28210 57602; Agion Deka 18; wash & dry €6)

## LEFT LUGGAGE

**KTEL bus station** (☎ 28210 93052; Kydonias 73-77; per day €1.50)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hania Hospital** (☎ 28210 22000; Mournies) Located south of town.

## MONEY

Most banks are concentrated around the new city, but there are ATMs in the Old Town on Halidon, including **Alpha Bank** (cnr Halidon & Skalidi) and **Citibank**. The **National Bank of Greece** (cnr Tzanakaki & Giannari) has a 24-hour exchange machine.

## POST

**Post office** (☎ 28210 28445; Peridou 10; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**The Municipal Tourist Information Office** (☎ 28210 36155; tourism@chania.gr; Kydonias 29; ☎ 8am-2.30pm) is located under the Town Hall and provides helpful practical information and maps. An information booth behind the mosque in Old Harbour also tends to be manned between noon and 2pm.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Tellus Travel** (☎ 28210 91500; Halidon 108; www.tellustravel.gr; ☎ 8am-11pm) Rents cars, changes money, arranges air and boat tickets, accommodation and excursions.

## Sights

### MUSEUMS

**Hania's Archaeological Museum** (☎ 28210 90334; Halidon 30; admission €2, incl Byzantine Collection €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun, closes later in summer but hr vary) is housed in the impressive 16th-century Venetian Church of San Francisco. The Turkish fountain in the grounds is a relic from the building's days as a mosque. The museum houses a well-displayed collection of finds

from western Crete dating from the Neolithic to the Roman era, including statues, vases, jewellery, three splendid floor mosaics and some impressive painted sarcophagi from the Late-Minoan cemetery of Armeni.

The **Naval Museum** (☎ 28210 91875; Akti Koundourioti; admission €3; ☎ 9am-4pm) has an interesting collection of model ships dating from the Bronze Age, naval instruments, paintings, photographs and memorabilia from the Battle of Crete. The museum is housed in the Firkas Fortress on the headland, once the old Turkish prison.

The **Byzantine and Post Byzantine Collection of Hania** (☎ 28210 96046; Theotokopoulou; admission €2, incl Archaeological Museum €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is in the impressively restored Church of San Salvatore, on the western side of the fortress. It has a small but fascinating collection of artefacts, icons, jewellery and coins, including a fine mosaic floor and a prized icon of St George slaying the dragon.

Hania's quaint and jam-packed **Cretan House Folklore Museum** (☎ 28210 90816; Halidon 46; admission €2; ☎ 9.30am-3pm & 6-9pm) contains a selection of crafts and implements including traditional weavings.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The massive fortifications built by the Venetians to provide a decent defence for their city remain impressive. The best-preserved section is the western wall, running from the **Firkas Fortress** to the **Siavo Bastion**. You can walk up to the top of the bastion for some good views of the Old Town (entry through the Naval Museum).

The Venetian **lighthouse** at the entrance to the harbour has been restored, though the new lighting along the sea wall could have been more subtle. It's a 1.5km walk around the sea wall to get there.

On the eastern side of Hania's inner harbour you will see the prominent **Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan** (also commonly known as the Mosque of Janissaries), which houses regular art exhibitions.

The **Great Arsenal** has been stunningly restored and is now home to the Centre for Mediterranean Architecture, which hosts regular events and exhibitions.

The restored **Etz Hayyim Synagogue** (Parodos Kondylaki; ☎ 28210 86286; www.etz-hayyim-hania.org; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 5-8pm Sun, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon) has a very moving memorial to

the Jews of Hania who were extinguished by the Nazis.

Hania's **Municipal Art Gallery** (☎ 28210 92294; www.pinakothiki-kania.gr; Halidon 98; ☎ 10am-2pm & 7-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; €2; free admission Wed) hosts exhibitions of modern Greek art.

You can escape the crowds of the Venetian quarter by taking a stroll around the Turkish **Splantzia quarter** – a delightful tangle of narrow streets and little squares that is slowly being restored and the streets paved and cut off to traffic. It is attracting new boutique hotels, galleries and artistic or alternative pursuits. Along Daliani, you will see one of Hania's two remaining **minarets**.

You can see excavation works at the site of **Ancient Kydonia**, to the east of the old harbour at the junction of Kanevaro and Kandaloneou.

## Activities

**Alpine Travel** (☎ 28210 50939; www.alpine.gr; Boiniali 11-19) organises a range of trekking programmes.

**EOS** (☎ 28210 44647; www.eoshanion.gr; Tzanakaki 90), the Hania branch of the Greek Mountaineering Association, has information about serious climbing in the Lefka Ori, Greece's mountain refuges and the Trans-European E4 trail. It runs regular weekend excursions.

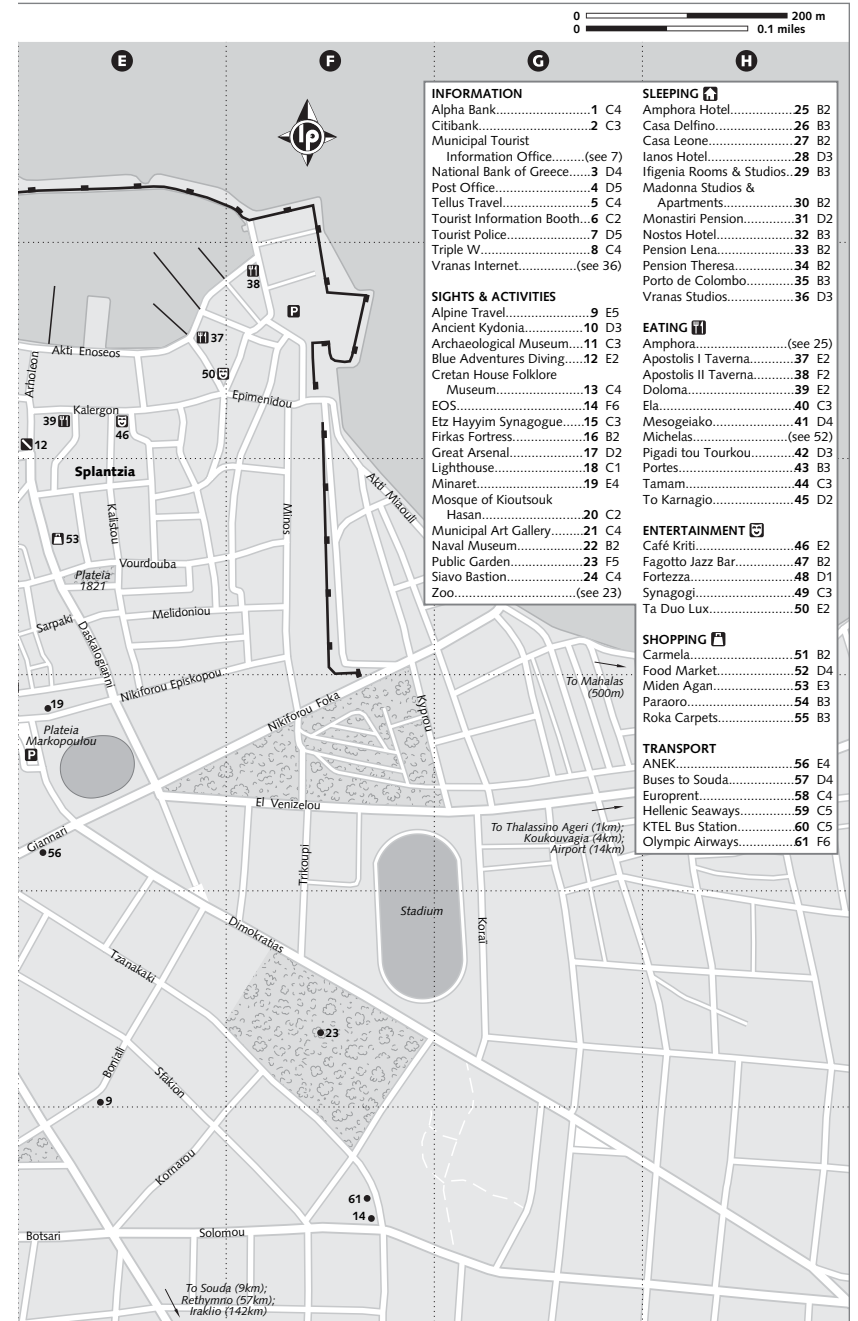
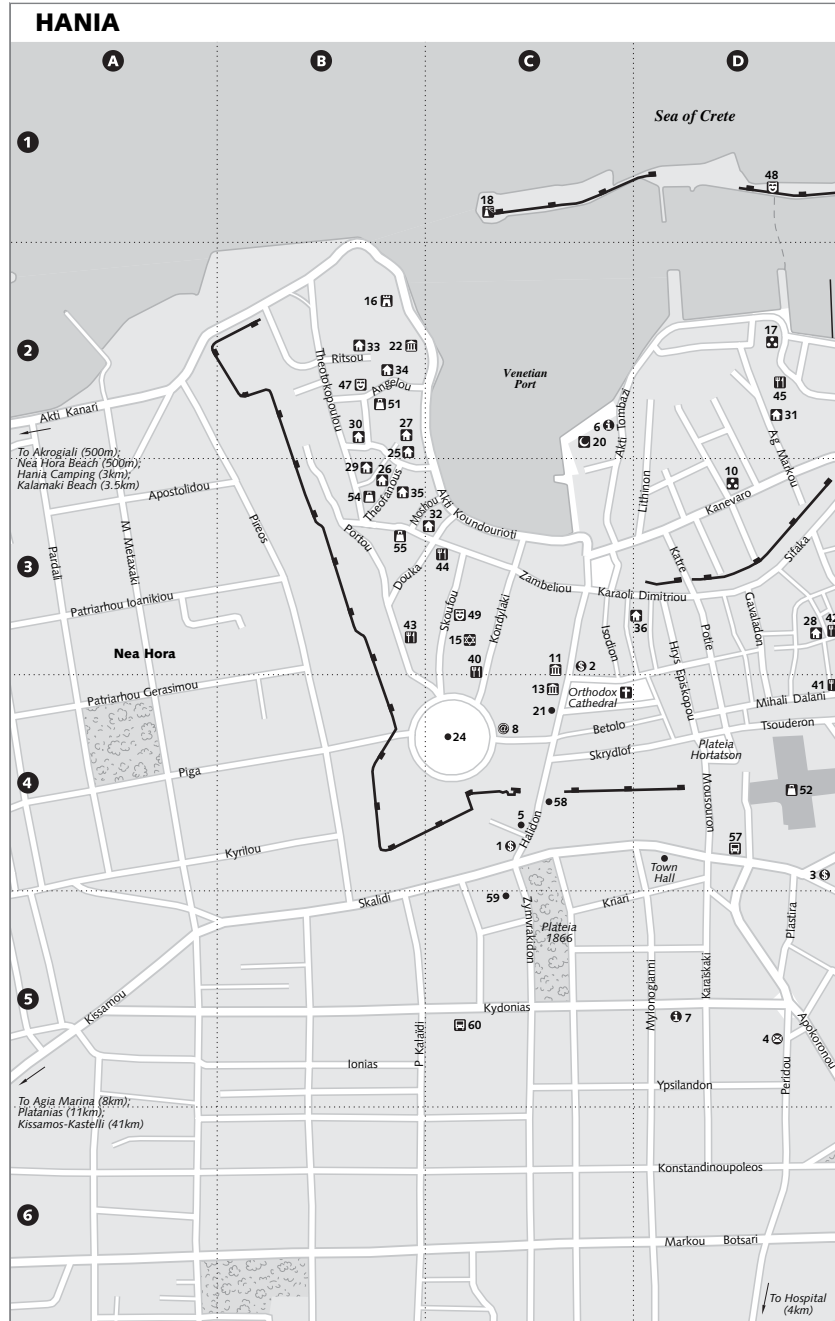
**Trekking Plan** (☎ 28210 60861; www.cycling.gr), 8km west of town in Agia Marina, organises treks to the Agia Irini and Imbros gorges, climbs of Mt Gingilos, mountain-bike tours, canyoning, rappelling, rock-climbing and kayaking trips.

**Blue Adventures Diving** (☎ 28210 40608; www.blueadventuresdiving.gr; Arholeon 11) offers a PADI certification course (€370) and daily diving trips around Hania (two dives €75), including beginner dives. There are also snorkelling trips and cruise options.

## Hania for Children

If your five-year-old has lost interest in Venetian architecture, head to the **public garden** between Tzanakaki and Dimokratias, where there's a playground, a small **zoo** with two resident kri-kri (Cretan goat) and a shady café. A few kilometres south of town the giant water park **Limnopolis** (☎ 28210 33246; Varypetro; day pass adult/children 6-12 €17/12; afternoon pass €12/9; ☎ 10am-7pm) has enough slides and rides to keep kids amused.

Buses leave regularly from the KTEL bus station (€1.60).



INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
Alpha Bank	1 C4	Amphora Hotel	25 B2
Citibank	2 C3	Casa Delfino	26 B3
Municipal Tourist Information Office	(see 7)	Casa Leone	27 B2
National Bank of Greece	3 D4	Ianos Hotel	28 D3
Post Office	4 D5	Ifigenia Rooms & Studios	29 B3
Tellus Travel	5 C4	Madonna Studios & Apartments	30 B2
Tourist Information Booth	6 C2	Monastiri Pension	31 D2
Tourist Police	7 D5	Nostos Hotel	32 B3
Triple W	8 C4	Pension Lena	33 B2
Vranas Internet	(see 36)	Pension Theresa	34 B2
		Porto de Colombo	35 B3
		Vranas Studios	36 D3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
Alpine Travel	9 E5	Apostolis I Taverna	(see 25)
Ancient Kydonia	10 D3	Apostolis II Taverna	37 E2
Archaeological Museum	11 C3	Doloma	38 F2
Blue Adventures Diving	12 E2	Ela	39 E2
Cretan House Folklore Museum	13 C4	Mesogeiakou	40 C3
EOS	14 F6	Michelas	(see 52)
Etz Hayyim Synagogue	15 C3	Pigadi tou Tourkou	42 D3
Firkas Fortress	16 B2	Portes	43 B3
Great Arsenal	17 D2	Tamarn	44 C3
Lighthouse	18 C1	To Karnagio	45 D2
Minaret	19 E4		
Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan	20 C2	ENTERTAINMENT	
Municipal Art Gallery	21 C4	Café Kriti	46 E2
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Zoo	(see 23)	Ta Duo Lux	50 E2
SHOPPING			
		Carmela	51 B2
		Food Market	52 D4
		Miden Agan	53 E3
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		Roka Carpets	55 B3
TRANSPORT			
		ANEK	56 E4
		Buses to Souda	57 D4
		Eurorent	58 C4
		Hellenic Seaways	59 C5
		KTEL Bus Station	60 C5
		Olympic Airways	61 F6

CRETE

CRETE

## Tours

Boat excursions from the harbour take you to the nearby islands of Agii Theodorou and Lazaretto and the Gulf of Hania. The **M/S Irini** (☎ 28210 52001; cruises €15, sunset cruises €8, children under 7 free) runs daily cruises on a lovely 1930s cruiser, including free snorkelling gear, and sunset cruises with complimentary fruit and *raki*.

Several operators offer pathetically short half- or one-hour cruises or rides on murky glass bottomed boats, but they are hardly worth it.

## Sleeping BUDGET

**Hania Camping** (☎ 28210 31138; camhania@otenet.gr; Agii Apostoli; caravan/camp sites per adult/tent €7/5/4; 🚰), 3km west of town on the beach, is shaded and has a restaurant, bar and minimarket and pool. Take a Kalamaki Beach bus (every 15 minutes) from the southeast corner of Plateia 1866.

**Pension Lena** (☎ 28210 86860; lenachania@hotmail.com; Ritsou 5; s/d €35/55; 🚰) Lena's is a friendly, cosy pension in an old Turkish building. It has an old-world feel and a scattering of antiques, though the front rooms are the most appealing.

**Pension Theresa** (☎/fax 28210 92798; Angelou 2; r €40-50; 🚰) This creaky old house with a steep spiral staircase and antique furniture is the most atmospheric pension in Hania. It attracts many artists and writers and it can be hard to score a room. Some rooms have a view, but there's always the stunning vista from the rooftop terrace where you can use the communal kitchen. The rooms have TV, air-con and lofts with an extra bed, though some are on the tight side.

**Monastiri Pension** (☎/fax 28210 41032; Agiou Markou 18 & Kanevarou; d & tr €40-55; 🚰) The stone arched entry and antique family furniture in the communal area give this older-style budget place a certain charm. Bathrooms are a basic add-on, but the rooms have a fridge, some have air-con and the front rooms have balconies with sea views.

## MIDRANGE

**Vranas Studios** (☎ 28210 58618; www.vranas.gr; Agion Deka 10; studio €40-70; 🚰) This place is on a lively pedestrian street and has spacious, immaculately maintained studios with kitchenettes. All rooms have polished wooden floors, bal-

conies, TVs and telephones. Air-con is also available and there's a handy internet café attached.

**Ifigenia Rooms & Studios** (☎ 28210 94357; www.ifiigeniastudios.gr; Gamba 23 & Parodos Agelou; studio €35-140; 🚰) This network of six refurbished houses around the Venetian port offers a range of options from simple rooms to fancy suites with kitchenettes, Jacuzzis and views. Some bathrooms are very basic, the décor a little contrived and the renovations not always sympathetic.

**Madonna Studios & Apartments** (☎ 28210 94747; madonnastudios@yahoo.co.uk; Gamba 33; studio €70-110; 🚰) This charming pension has five attractive and well-appointed studios around a lovely flower-filled courtyard. They are furnished in traditional style. The front top room has a superb balcony, while the courtyard room has the original stone wash trough.

**Porto de Colombo** (☎ 28210 70945; colompo@otenet.gr; Theofanous & Moschon; d/ste incl breakfast €84/103; 🚰) The Venetian mansion that was once the French embassy and office of Eleftherios Venizelos is now a charming boutique hotel with 10 lovely, well-appointed rooms; the top suites have fine harbour views.

**Nostos Hotel** (☎ 28210 94743; www.nostos-hotel.com; Zambeliou 42-46; s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/80/120; 🚰) Mixing Venetian style and modern fixtures, this 600-year-old building has been remodelled into split-level rooms all with kitchenette and phone and there's a roof garden. Try to get a balcony room with harbour views.

**Ionas Hotel** (☎ 28210 55090; www.ionashotel.gr; Sarpaki & Sorvolou; d incl buffet breakfast €50-80, ste incl buffet breakfast €120; 🚰) This is one of the new breed of boutique hotels in the quiet Splantzia quarter. The historic building has a contemporary design and fit-out and the nine rooms with all the mod-cons and a small terrace on the roof.

## TOP END

**Amphora Hotel** (☎ 28210 93224; www.amphora.gr; Parodos Theotokopoulou 20; d with view €120, ste €145; 🚰) This historically evocative hotel is in an immaculately restored and kept Venetian mansion and in a second connected wing. The rooms are elegantly decorated and the best rooms are in the main building with views of the harbour. Front rooms can be noisy in the summer. There are cheaper rooms without a view and they could all do with a fridge. Breakfast is €10.

**our pick Casa Leone** (☎ 28210 76762; www.casa-leone.com; Parodos Theotokopoulou 18; s & d incl breakfast €120-150; 🚰) This Venetian residence has been converted into a classy and romantic boutique hotel. The rooms are spacious and well appointed, with balconies overlooking the harbour.

**Casa Delfino** (☎ 28210 93098; www.casadelfino.com; Theofanous 7; d & apt incl buffet breakfast €186-316; 🚰) This elegant 17th-century mansion is the most luxurious hotel in the Old Town. Breakfast is in the splendid pebble-mosaic courtyard.

## Eating

Hania has some of the finest restaurants in Crete. Most of the prime-position waterfront tavernas are predictably mediocre, overpriced and fronted by annoying touts. Head for the back streets, where some of the best tavernas are housed in roofless Venetian ruins.

## BUDGET

**Doloma** (☎ 28210 51196; Kalergon 8; mayirefta €4.50-6; 🍷 Mon-Sat) This unpretentious taverna is half-hidden amid the vines and foliage that surround the outdoor terrace at the far end of the harbour. The traditional cooking is faultless.

**Michelas** (☎ 28210 90026; mains €5-7; 🍷 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) Near the meat section of the food market (see p492), Michelas has been serving great fresh, and cheap, traditional cuisine for 75 years.

**Tamam** (☎ 28210 96080; Zambeliou 49; mains €5.50-8.50) Housed in old Turkish baths, Tamam presents a superb selection of vegetarian specialities and eastern influenced dishes. The Tamam salad is excellent and the Beyendi chicken with creamy aubergine purée a favourite.

## MIDRANGE

**our pick Portes** (☎ 28210 76261; Portou 48; mains €6-8.50) Affable Susanna from Limerick cooks up Cretan treats with a difference at this superb restaurant in a quiet street in the Old Town. Try her divine *gavros* (marinated anchovies) or stuffed fish baked in paper or the tasty meatballs with leek and tomato.

**To Karnagio** (☎ 28210 53366; Plateia Katehaki 8; Cretan specials €5-10.50) is a popular place with outdoor tables near the Great Arsenal. There is a good range of seafood (try the grilled cuttlefish) and classic Cretan dishes, plus a fine wine list.

**Mesogeiako** (☎ 28210 59772; Daliani 36; mezehdes €3.20-5.60) This promising newcomer near the

minaret in the revitalised Spantzia quarter is a trendy *mezehdhopoleio* serving an array of classic and more creative dishes. Try the pork meatballs and excellent *raki*.

**Ela** (☎ 28210 74128; Kondylaki 47; mains €6.50-18; 🍷 noon-1am) This 14th-century building was a soap factory, then a school, distillery and cheese-processing plant. Now Ela serves up a decent array of Cretan specialities, such as goat with artichokes, while musicians create a lively ambience. The tacky board outside tells you it's in every guidebook but the accolades are not undeserved.

**Pigadi tou Tourkou** (☎ 28210 54547; Sarpaki 1-3; mains €10-14.30; 🍷 dinner, closed Mon-Tue) Features from this former steam-bath, including the well it is named after (Well of the Turk), are incorporated into the design of this popular restaurant, which has tantalising dishes inspired by Crete, Morocco and the Middle East. The service can be patchy and prices have crept up.

**Apostolis I & II Taverna** (☎ 28210 43470; Akti Enoseos; fish per kg up to €55) In the quieter eastern harbour, this is a well-respected place for fresh fish and Cretan dishes in two separate buildings. Apostolis II is the more popular as the owner reigns there, but the original has the same menu at marginally cheaper prices. A seafood platter for two, including salad, is €30.

Also recommended is the excellent **Amphora** restaurant below the hotel (see opposite).

## Entertainment

The harbour's lively waterfront bars and clubs are mostly patronised by tourists. Party animals head to the clubs in Platanias and Agia Marina, 11km west of Hania, but there are some lively bars in the Old Town.

**Synagogi** (☎ 28210 96797; Skoufou 15) Housed in a roofless Venetian building that was once a synagogue, this is the favourite haunt of young locals.

**Fagotto Jazz Bar** (☎ 28210 71877; Angelou 16; 🍷 7pm-2am Jul-May) A Hania institution housed in a restored Venetian building playing jazz and light rock and blues. Check out the saxophone beer tap.

**Fortezza** (☎ 28210 46546) This café, bar and restaurant, installed in the old Venetian ramparts across the harbour, is a good place for a sunset drink. A regular free barge will save you the walk.

The arty café/bar **Ta Duo Lux** (☎ 28210 52519; Sarpidou 8; 🍷 10am-late) remains a perennial



favourite hangout for younger crowds and is popular day and night, while the rough-and-ready **Café Kriti** (☎ 28210 58661; Kalergon 22; ☎ 8pm-late) has live Cretan music.

## Shopping

Hania offers the best combination of souvenir hunting and shopping for crafts on the island, with many local artisans at work in their stores. The best shops are along Zambeliou and Theotokopoulou. Skrydlof is 'leather lane', and the central market is well worth a look. Hania's magnificent covered **food market** is worth a visit even if you don't want to shop.

**Carmela** (☎ 28210 90487; Angelou 7) This exquisite store has a tempting array of original jewellery designs as well as Carmela's unique ceramics using ancient techniques. It also has jewellery and ceramics by leading Greek artists.

**Paraoro** (☎ 28210 88990; Theotokopoulou 16) Stamatias Fasoularis' distinctive series of metal boats are functional as well as decorative, like his nifty steamship oil-burner. This workshop also has unique ceramics by artist Yiorgos Vavatsis, including his trademark skewed drinkware. Their bigger gallery pieces are exhibited upstairs.

**Roka Carpets** (☎ 28210 74736; Zambeliou 61) You can watch the charming Mihalis Manousakis weave his wondrous rugs on a 400-year-old loom. This is one of the few places in Crete where you can buy genuine, hand-woven goods.

**Miden Agan** (☎ 28210 27068; www.midenaganshop.gr; Daskalogianni 70; ☎ 10am-3.30 Mon & Wed, 10am-2.15pm & 6.15-10pm Tue & Thu-Sat) Foodies and wine lovers will be delighted with the range at this excellent shop that sells its own wine and liquors, along with over 800 Greek wines. There is a wide variety of local gourmet delights.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Hania's airport (CHQ) is 14km east of town on the Akrotiri Peninsula.

**Olympic Airlines** (☎ 28210 58005; www.olympicairlines.com; IZanakaki 88) operates five daily flights to/from Athens (€76 to €106) and four flights per week to/from Thessaloniki (€126 to €136).

**Aegean Airlines** (☎ 28210 63366; www.aegeanair.com) has four daily flights to Athens (€76 to €123) and one to Thessaloniki (€125 to €135).

**Sky Express** (☎ 28102 23500; www.skyexpress.gr) This newcomer operates daily flights from

Hania to Rhodes on 18-seater planes (from €104, one hour).

### BUS

In summer, buses depart from Hania's **bus station** (☎ 28210 93052) during the week for the following destinations.

#### BUS SERVICES FROM HANIA

Destination	Duration	Fare	Frequency
Elafonisi	2½ hr	€9.60	1 daily
Falasarna	1½ hr	€6.50	3 daily
Hora Sfakion	1 hr 40min	€6.50	3 daily
Iraklio	2¼ hr	€10.70	half-hourly
Kissamos-Kastelli	1 hr	€4	13 daily
Moni Agias Triadas	30 min	€2	2 daily
Omalos (for Samaria Gorge)	1 hr	€5.90	3 daily
Paleohora	1 hr 50min	€6.50	4 daily
Rethymno	1 hr	€6	half-hourly
Sougia	1 hr 50min	€6.10	2 daily
Stavros	30 min	€1.80	3 daily

#### CATAMARAN & FERRY

Hania's main port is at Souda, about 7km southeast of town. There are frequent buses to Hania (€1.15), as well as taxis (€7).

**ANEK** (☎ 28210 27500; www.aneke.gr; Plateia Sofokli Venizelou) has a daily boat at 9pm from Piraeus to Hania (€30, nine hours) and at 8pm from Hania to Piraeus. In July and August there is also a morning ferry from Piraeus (€30).

**Hellenic Seaways** (☎ 28210 75444; www.hellenicseaways.gr; Plateia 1866 14) has a high-speed catamaran service that takes only 4½ hours (€53). It's a better option for getting to Hania as it arrives at 8.30pm, but it returns to Athens rather inconveniently at 2am.

**Port Police** (☎ 28210 89240) can provide ferry information.

## Getting Around

There are three buses a day to the airport (€2, 20 mins). A taxi to the airport will cost about €18.

**Local blue buses** (☎ 28210 27044) meet the ferries at the port of Souda, just near the dock. In Hania, the bus to Souda (€1.15) leaves from outside the food market, and buses for the western beaches leave from the main bus station on Plateia 1866.

Most motorcycle-hire outlets are on Halidon, but the companies at Agia Marina are competitive and can bring cars to Hania. Most

of the old town is pedestrian only. The best place to park is in the free parking area near the Firkas Fortress (turn right off Skalidi at the sign to the big supermarket car park and follow the road down to the waterfront).

**Europrint** (☎ 28210 27810; Halidon 87)

**Tellus Travel** (☎ 28210 91500; www.tellustravel.gr; Halidon 108)

## AKROTIRI PENINSULA ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙ

The Akrotiri (ahk-ro-tee-rih) Peninsula, to the northeast of Hania, has a few places of fairly minor interest, Hania's airport, port and a military base. There is an immaculate **military cemetery** at Souda, where about 1500 British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Crete are buried. The buses to Souda port from outside the Hania food market can drop you at the cemetery.

Almost at the northern tip of the peninsula is the lovely sandy beach of **Stavros**, famous as the dramatic backdrop for the final dancing scene in the classic film *Zorba the Greek*.

There are two working monasteries on the Akrotiri Peninsula. The more visitor-friendly is the impressive 17th-century **Moni Agias Triadas** (☎ 28210 63310; admission €2; ☎ 8am-7pm), which was founded by the Venetian monks Jeremiah and Laurentio Giancarolo, converts to the Orthodox faith. A small store sells the monastery's fine wine, oil and *raki*.

The 16th-century **Moni Gouvernetou** (☎ 28210 63319; ☎ 9am-midday & 5-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, Sat & Sun 5am-11am & 5-8pm) is 4km north of Moni Agias Triada. The church inside the monastery has an ornate sculptured Venetian façade.

There are six buses daily to Stavros beach (€1.80) and two buses weekdays to Moni Agias Triadas (€2, 40 minutes). If you're driving, follow signs to the airport and branch off at the signposted turnoff.

## HANIA TO XYLOSKALO ΧΑΝΙΑ ΠΙΡΟΣ ΞΥΛΟΣΚΑΛΟ

The road from Hania to the beginning of the Samaria Gorge is one of the most spectacular routes on Crete. It heads through orange groves to the village of **Fournes** where a left fork leads to **Meskla**. The main road continues to the village of **Lakki**, 24km from Hania. This unspoilt village in the Lefka Ori Mountains affords stunning views wherever you look. The village was a centre of resistance during the uprising against the Turks, and during WWII.

From Lakki, the road continues to **Omalos** and **Xyloskalo**, the start of the Samaria Gorge. A number of hikers choose to stay at Omalos in order to make the earliest start possible.

The big stone-built **Hotel Exari** (☎ 28210 67180; www.exari.gr; s/d €20/30) has pleasant, well-furnished rooms with TV, bathtub and balconies. The owner Yiorgos will give walkers lifts to the start of the Samaria Gorge and can deliver luggage to Sougia for groups. There is an attached taverna.

Rooms at the friendly **Hotel Gingilos** (☎ 28210 67181; s/d/tr €20/25/35) are rather sparse, but are large (the triples are huge), clean and have tasteful timber furniture. There is a communal balcony and a taverna downstairs.

The Hania EOS (Greek Mountaineering Club) maintains the **Kallergi Hut** (☎ 28210 33199; dm members/nonmembers €10/13), located in the hills between Omalos and the Samaria Gorge. It makes a good base for exploring Mt Gingilos and surrounding peaks.

## SAMARIA GORGE ΦΑΡΑΓΓΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΑΜΑΡΙΑΣ

Despite the crowds who tramp through the **Samaria Gorge** (☎ 28210 67179; admission €5; ☎ 6am-3pm May-mid-Oct), a trek through this stupendous gorge is still an experience to remember.

At 16km, the Samaria (sah-mah-rih-ah) Gorge is supposedly the longest in Europe. It begins just below the Omalos Plateau, carved out by the river that flows between the peaks of Avlimanakou (1857m) and Volakias (2116m). Its width varies from 150m to 3m and its vertical walls reach 500m at their highest points. The gorge has an incredible number of wild flowers, which are at their best in April and May.

It is also home to a large number of endangered species, including the Cretan wild goat, the kri-kri, which survives in the wild only here and on the islet of Kri-Kri, off the coast of Agios Nikolaos. The gorge was made a national park in 1962 to save the kri-kri from extinction. You are unlikely to see too many of these shy animals, which show a marked aversion to trekkers.

An early start (before 8am) helps to avoid the worst of the crowds, but even the early bus from Hania to the top of the gorge can be packed. There's no spending the night in the gorge so you must complete the hike in the time allocated.

The trek from **Xyloskalo**, the name of the steep stone pathway with wooden rails that gives access to the gorge, to **Agia Roumeli** takes from between 4½ hours for the sprinters to six hours for the strollers. Early in the season it's sometimes necessary to wade through the stream. Later, as the flow drops, it's possible to use rocks as stepping stones.

The gorge is wide and open for the first 6km, until you reach the abandoned settlement of **Samaria**. The inhabitants were relocated when the gorge became a national park. Just south of the village is a small church dedicated to **Saint Maria of Egypt**, after whom the gorge is named.

The gorge then narrows and becomes more dramatic until, at the 11km mark, the walls are only 3.5m apart – the famous **Iron Gates** (Sidiroportes). Here a rickety wooden pathway leads trekkers the 20m or so over the water and through to the other side.

The gorge ends at the 12.5km mark just north of the almost abandoned village of **Old Agia Roumeli**. From here it's a further uninteresting 2km hike to the welcoming seaside resort of Agia Roumeli, where most hikers end up taking a refreshing dip in the sea.

### Getting There & Away

There are excursions to the Samaria Gorge from every sizable town and resort on Crete. 'Samaria Gorge Long Way' is the regular trek from Omalos and 'Samaria Gorge Easy Way' starts at Agia Roumeli and takes you up as far as the Iron Gates.

Obviously it's cheaper to trek the Samaria Gorge under your own steam. Hania is the most convenient base. There are buses to Xyloskalo (Omalos; €5.90, 1½ hours) at 6.15am, 7.30am, and 8.30am. There's also a direct bus to Xyloskalo from Paleohora (€5.50, 1½ hours) at 6.15am.

#### A SHORT SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE GORGE

The Samaria gorge is not a walk in the park and you should only attempt it if you have a reasonable level of fitness. If you find that the going is too tough within the first hour, there are park wardens with donkeys who will take you back to the beginning.

Rugged footwear is essential for walking on the uneven ground, which is covered by sharp stones. Don't attempt the walk in unsuitable footwear – you will regret it. Take a hat and sunscreen, plus a small bottle of water that can be refilled along the way in the many springs spurting cool water (it's inadvisable to drink water from the main stream). Bring energy foods to snack on. Be wary of falling rocks, which have caused fatalities.

### AGIA ROUMELI ΑΓΙΑ ΡΟΥΜΕΛΗ

pop 121

These days most travellers just pass through Agia Roumeli waiting to catch the boat to Hora Sfakion. It's pleasant enough for a stopover, although the surrounding mountains can make it very hot and stifling.

If you've just trekked through the gorge and you're in no hurry to leave, there are quite a few decent places to stay and eat.

**Farangi Restaurant** (☎ 28250 91225; mains €4.50-8.50) has excellent Cretan specials and there are some tidy rooms (d/tr €30/35; 🍴) above the restaurant.

**Gigilos Taverna & Rooms** (☎ 28250 91383; gigilos@mycosmos.gr; s/d/tr €25/35/40; 🍴) on the beach at the western end of the village are clean and nicely furnished, with decent new bathrooms and a communal fridge. The taverna has a huge shady deck on the beach. Meals cost €4 to €7 for mains.

There are two afternoon boats daily (3.45pm and 6pm) from Agia Roumeli to Hora Sfakion (€7.50, one hour) via Loutro (€5, 45 minutes) that connect with the bus back to Hania, as well as a morning boat from Paleohora to Hora Sfakion. You can also head west to Paleohora (€11, 1½ hours) at 4.45pm, via Sougia (€6.30, 45 minutes). The **ticket office** (☎ 28250 91251) is near the port.

### LOUTRO ΛΟΥΤΡΟ

The former fishing village of **Loutro**, between Agia Roumeli and Hora Sfakion, is little more than a crescent of white-and-blue domatia around a tiny beach. It's a tiny, pleasant, lazy resort that is never overwhelmed with visitors, although it can get busy in July and August. Loutro is the only natural harbour on the south coast of Crete and is only accessible by boat or on foot. The absence of cars and bikes makes it quiet and peaceful.

Given the captive market, the tavernas that line the waterfront in Loutro are surprisingly good.

**The Blue House** (☎ 28250 91127; bluehouseloutro@chania-ct.gr; d €40-45; 🍴) has a mix of spacious, well-appointed rooms with big verandas overlooking the port. The nicer rooms are in the refurbished top floor section. The taverna downstairs serves excellent *mayirefta* (€5 to €7), including delicious garlicky spinach and a great *houreki* (zucchini, potato and goat's cheese bake).

### HORA SFAKION ΧΩΡΑ ΣΦΑΚΙΩΝ

pop 351

Hora Sfakion (*ho-rah sfah-kee-on*) is a small coastal port where hordes of walkers from the Samaria Gorge spill off the boats from Agia Roumeli. Most people pause only long enough to catch the next bus out. Hora Sfakion does however have some decent sleeping and eating options, and is a convenient base for heading westwards to other resorts or taking a ferry to Gavdos.

Hora Sfakion played a prominent role during WWII when thousands of Allied troops were evacuated by sea from the town after the Battle of Crete.

The ferry quay is at the eastern side of the harbour. Buses leave from the square up the hill on the eastern side. There is one ATM. The post office is on the square.

Up the steps at the western end of the port, **Rooms Stavris** (☎ 28250 91220; stavris@sfakia-crete.com; s/d €21/24; 🍴) has clean, basic rooms – some with kitchenettes and fridges – and there were plans to refurbish them.

The best value rooms in town are in **Xenia** (☎ 28250 91490; fax 28250 91491; d €33/38; 🍴), a refurbished hotel well-positioned at the western edge of town. The rooms in the main building are a little cramped but those in the modern wing are spacious and enjoy a superb seafront position.

### Getting There & Away

**BUS**

There are four buses a day from Hora Sfakion to Hania (€6.50, two hours) – the afternoon buses at 5.30pm and 7pm wait for the boats from Agia Roumeli. In summer there are two daily buses to Rethymno via Vryses (€6.50, 1 hour). There are two buses daily to Frangokastello (€1.50, 25 minutes).

### FERRY

Boat tickets are sold in the **booth** (☎ 28250 91221) in the car park. From June through August there is a daily boat from Hora Sfakion to Paleohora (€11, three hours) via Loutro, Agia Roumeli and Sougia. There are four additional boats between Hora Sfakion and Agia Roumeli (€7.50, one hour) via Loutro (€4, 15 minutes). From 1 June there are boats (€12, 1½ hours) to Gavdos island (see p499) on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

### AROUND HORA SFAKION

The road from Vryses to Hora Sfakion cuts through the heart of the Sfakia region in the eastern Lefka Ori. The inhabitants of this region have long had a reputation for fearlessness and independence – characteristics they retain to this day.

One of Crete's most celebrated heroes, Ioannis Daskalogiannis, was from Sfakia. In 1770 Daskalogiannis led the first Cretan insurrection against Ottoman rule. When help promised by Russia failed to materialise, he gave himself up to the Turks to save his followers. The Turks skinned him alive in Iraklio.

The Turks never succeeded in controlling the Sfakiots, and this rugged mountainous region was the scene of fierce fighting.

The village of **Imbros**, 23km from Vryses, is at the head of the beautiful 8km **Imbros Gorge** (admission €2), which is far less visited than the Samaria Gorge. To get there, take any bus bound for Hora Sfakion from the north coast and get off at Imbros. Walk out of the village towards Hora Sfakion and a path to the left leads down to the gorge. The gorge path ends at the village of **Komitades**, from where you can walk 5km or take a taxi to Hora Sfakion (€17 to €20).

### FRANGOKASTELLO ΦΡΑΓΚΟΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΟ

pop 153

Frangokastello is a magnificent 14th-century fortress on the coast 15km east of Hora Sfakion. It was built by the Venetians as a defence against pirates and rebel Sfakiots, who resented the Venetian occupation as much as they did the Turkish.

On 17 May 1828 many Cretan rebels were killed here by the Turks. Legend has it that at dawn each anniversary their ghosts, the

'drosolites', can be seen marching along the beach.

The wide, packed white-sand beach beneath the fortress slopes gradually into shallow warm water, making it ideal for kids. Most accommodation is set back from the shore, leaving the area's natural beauty largely untouched. Frangokastello is popular with day-trippers, but it is a peaceful retreat.

**Oasis** (☎ /fax 28250 92136; www.oasisrooms.com; mains €4.50-8), is an excellent family-run taverna and accommodation complex at the western end of Frangokastello, which has spacious rooms with full-size kitchens set in a lovely garden. You can walk to a quiet stretch of beach. The taverna has an extensive menu of well-executed Cretan dishes.

Two daily buses from Hora Sfakion stop at Frangokastello (€1.50).

## SOUGIA ΣΟΥΓΙΑ

pop 109

Sougia (soo-yah), 67km from Hania, is a tiny laid-back beach resort with a wide curve of sand-and-pebble beach and a tree-lined coastal road. Sougia's tranquillity has been preserved largely because of archaeological remains at the eastern end of the beach which prohibit development. It lies at the foot of a narrow, twisting road that also deters most tour buses and passing traffic. There are a few small complexes of rooms, a few tavernas, a couple of lazy beach bars, two beach clubs and a small settlement of campers and nudists at the eastern end of the beach.

### Information

There is an ATM next to Taverna Galini Sougia but no post office. The bus stop is outside the Santa Irene Hotel. Check out www.sougia.info for more accommodation options. **Internet Lotos** (☎ 28230 51191; per hr €3) is open from 7am until late.

### Sleeping

**Aretousa** (☎ 28230 51178; fax 28230 51178; s/d/studio €35/40/42; 📶) This lovely pension on the road to Hania has bright and comfortable refurbished rooms with new beds and linen, flat screen TVs, as well as studios with kitchenettes.

**Rooms Ririka** (☎ 28230 51167; s/d €35/40; 📶) Has small but homey rooms right on the eastern side of the beach over a lovely garden courtyard.

**Captain George** (☎ 28230 51133; g-gentek@otenet.gr; r/studio/tr €35/40/48; 📶) Attractive, good value rooms and studios in a lovely garden with a resident kri-kri. The owner runs taxiboat trips to nearby Lissos and other beaches.

**Arhontiko** (☎ 28230 51200; r €40-50; 📶) Tucked behind the supermarket, Arhontiko has spacious, attractive new studios and apartments comfortable for longer stays.

### Eating

**Taverna Rembetiko** (☎ 28230 51510; mezes €2.30-3.80) This popular taverna has an extensive menu including Cretan dishes such as *boureki* and stuffed zucchini flowers. It has a great atmosphere and is known for its good Greek music.

**Polyfimos** (☎ 28230 51343; mains €5.20-7.80; 🍷 dinner) Tucked off the Hania road behind the police station, ex-hippy Yianni makes his own oil, wine and *raki* and even makes dolmadhes (vine leaves stuffed with rice and sometimes meat) from the vines that cover the shady courtyard. The food is excellent and service from the affable Savvas delightful.

**Kyma** (☎ 28230 51670; meat dishes €5.50-7) On the beach, this has a good selection of *mayirefta* and fresh fish.

Also recommended are the international-style cuisine and French-run Omikron, towards the eastern end of the beach; and the Livykon taverna at the western end of the beach.

### Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus travelling from Hania to Sougia (€6.10, one hour and 50 mins).

Sougia is also on the Paleohora-Hora Sfakion boat route. Boats leave in the morning for Agia Roumeli (€6.30, 1½ hours), Loutro (€10, 1½ hours) and Hora Sfakion (€11, 1½ hours). For Paleohora (€7, one hour) to the west there is a departure at 5.15pm.

## PALEOHORA ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΩΡΑ

pop 2213

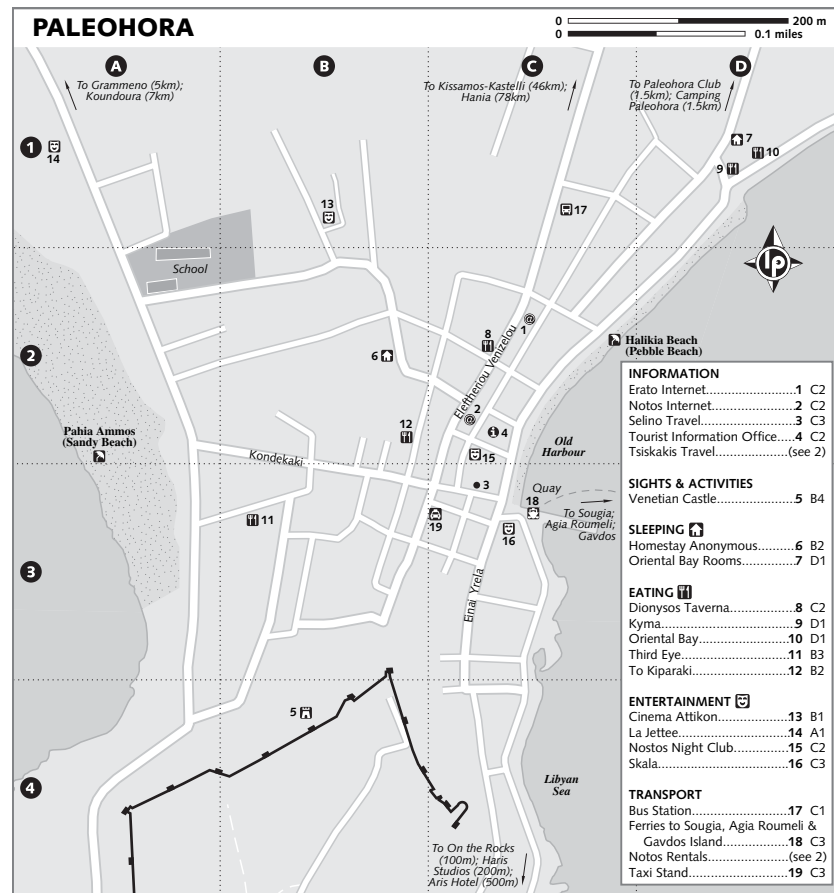
Paleohora (pal-ee-o-hor-a) was discovered by hippies back in the 1960s and from then on its days as a tranquil fishing village were numbered. Despite the mid-sized hotels and package tourists, the place is still appealing and retains a certain laid-back feel. The number of backpackers is dwindling and it has become more of a family destination, though it gets livelier in the peak of summer. It is also the

only beach resort on Crete that does not go into total hibernation in winter.

The little town lies on a narrow peninsula with a long, curving tamarisk-shaded sandy beach exposed to the wind on one side, and a sheltered pebbly beach on the other. On summer evenings the main street and beach road is closed to traffic and the tavernas move onto the road.

### Orientation & Information

Paleohora's main street, Eleftheriou Venizelou, runs north-south. There are three ATMs and a laundry on the main drag. The post office is at the northern end of Pahia Ammos beach. Boats leave from the old harbour at the southern end of the beach.



in the 16th century, and later the Germans during WWII.

From Paleohora, a six-hour walk along a scenic **coastal path** leads to Sougia, passing the ancient site of Ilassos. You can trek the Samaria and Agia Irini Gorge from Paleohora, either through organised tours or the local KTEL bus service, returning by ferry.

## Tours

Travel agents around town offer dolphin-watching trips (€16) and day trips to Elafonisi (€7, one hour).

**Selino Travel** (☎ 28230 42272; selino2@otenet.gr) Also sells boat tickets.

**Tsikakis Travel** (☎ 28230 42110; www.notoscar.com; Eleftheriou Venizelou 53)

## Sleeping

**Camping Paleohora** (☎ 28230 41120; camp sites per adult/tent €5/3) This large camping ground is 1.5km northeast of the town. Facilities are a bit primitive, though new management was planning to improve things.

**Homestay Anonymous** (☎ 28230 41509; www.anonymouhomestay.com; s/d/tr €17/24/28) This excellent small pension has great value rooms with shared cooking facilities in the courtyard garden. The rooms have exposed stone walls and are clean and tastefully furnished. The amiable owner, Manolis, is full of useful information for travellers and his mother next door looks after the place. Rooms can connect to accommodate families.

**Oriental Bay Rooms** (☎ 28230 41076; s/d/tr €30/35/38; ☎) These immaculate rooms are in the large modern building at the northern end of Pebble Beach. Rooms have balconies with sea or mountain view and come with kettle and fridge.

**Haris Studios** (☎ 28230 42438; www.paleochoraholidays.com; d/apt €45/50; ☎) Right on the dramatic rocky seafront around from the port, these friendly well-fitted studios are open all year. The top rooms are nicer and have great views. The bathrooms are basic but functional.

You could also try the budget rooms and apartments attached to Third Eye restaurant.

## Eating

**Dionysos Taverna** (☎ 28230 41243; mains €4.40-6.80) The popular Dionysos is known for top-grade food, particularly its excellent *mayirefta*. There is a good range of vegetarian dishes and grills.

**Grammeno** (☎ 28230 41505; Cretan specials €4.50-9) For excellent traditional Cretan food it is worth the trip to this spot about 5km west of Paleohora. The menu includes specialities like braised rooster, various wild greens, lamb in vine leaves and tender roast goat.

**our pick Third Eye** (☎ 28230 41234; mains €5) It's not just vegetarians who flock to Crete's only vegetarian restaurant, just inland from Pahlia Ammos. It has an eclectic menu of curries, salads, pastas and Greek and Asian dishes, and there is live music weekly.

**Oriental Bay** (☎ 28230 41322; mains €5-8) This beachside taverna is one of the best options on this side of the village. In addition to a range of cheap vegetarian choices, such as green beans and potatoes, there are dishes such as 'rooster's kiss' (chicken fillet with bacon) and 'drunk cutlet' (pork chop in red wine).

**To Kiparaki** (☎ 28230 42281; mains €8-9) Also recommended is the fresh Asian-style food at this Dutch-run place, with only eight tables in the little garden out the back.

**Kyma** (☎ 28230 41110; top fish €42kg) One of the better and cheaper places for fresh, local fish run by a fisherman. It has a pleasant setting on the quiet end of the beach, with a few tables outside under the trees.

## Entertainment

Outdoor film screenings start at 10pm at **Cinema Attikon** (tickets €5).

**Nostos Night Club** (btwn Eleftheriou Venizelou & the Old Harbour) has an outdoor terrace bar and a small indoor club playing Greek and Western music.

**La Jettee**, behind the Villa Marise hotel, is right on the beach and has a lovely garden, while **Skala**, by the port, is an old-time classic bar.

For late-night clubbing, **Paleohora Club** next to Camping Paleohora used to be popular for all-night, full-moon parties but is now a less-appealing swanky indoor club. There's a shuttle bus from the port.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

In summer there are four to six buses a day from the **bus station** (☎ 28230 41914) to Hania (€6.50, two hours). There is also one daily service to Omalos (€5.50, 2 hours) – for the Samaria Gorge – that departs at 6.15am, which also stops at the Agia Irini Gorge (€4.50).

## FERRY

Boat schedules change year to year so check with travel agents. In summer there is a daily morning ferry from Paleohora to Hora Sfakion (€14, three hours), via Sougia (€7, 50 minutes), Agia Roumeli (€11, 1½ hours) and Loutro (€13, 2½ hours). The same boat also continues three times a week in summer to Gavdos (€15, 2½ hours).

## Getting Around

**Notos Rentals** (☎ 28230 42110; notosgr@yahoo.gr; Eleftheriou Venizelou) rents cars, motorcycles and bicycles.

## GAVDOS ΓΑΥΔΟΣ

### pop 98

Gavdos, in the Libyan Sea 65km from Paleohora, is the most southerly place in Europe and is the island for those craving total isolation and peace. The island has three tiny villages and lovely, unspoiled beaches, some of which are accessible only by foot or boat. Gavdos attracts a loyal following of campers, nudists and free spirits seeking natural beaches, long walks and laid-back holidays. There are no hotels but quite a few people rent rooms and tavernas.

Until the late 1960s Gavdos had little water, electricity or phone lines. While water is now plentiful, there can still be the odd electricity shortages and blackouts. It is wise to take a torch. Strong winds can leave you stranded for days on end, but you won't find too many people complaining.

**Sarakiniko Studios** (☎ 28230 42182; www.gavdosstudios.gr; d/tr studio incl breakfast €50/60), above Sarakiniko beach, has comfortable studios and new villas sleeping up to five (€80 to €100). You can be picked up at the port or it is a 20-minute walk north of the port.

Services to Gavdos vary throughout the year and can take between 2½ to five hours depending on the boat and other stops, so it can be confusing. The most direct route to Gavdos is from Hora Sfakion on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (€15, 1½ hours). There are also two boats a week from Paleohora, increasing to three from mid-July to August (€15), though these services were going via the southern ports and Hora Sfakion making it a long trip.

Only some ferries take cars so check if you plan on taking one across.

You can rent a bike or car at the port or in Sarakiniko, though be wary that they may not be insured.

## ELAFONISI ΕΛΑΦΟΝΗΣΙ

As one of the loveliest sand beaches in Crete it's easy to understand why people enthuse so much about Elafonisi, at the southern extremity of Crete's west coast. The beach is long and wide and is separated from Elafonisi Islet by about 50m of knee-deep turquoise water on its northern side. The islet is marked by low dunes and a string of semi-secluded coves. Unfortunately it is invaded by busloads of day trippers.

There is one boat daily from Paleohora to Elafonisi (€7, one hour) from mid-June through September that leaves at 10am and returns at 4pm. There are also two buses daily from Hania (€9.60, 2½ hours) and Kissamos (€5.90, 1¼ hours) that return in the afternoon.

## KISSAMOS ΚΙΣΣΑΜΟΣ

### pop 3821

The north-coast town of Kissamos is near the port that serves the ferry from the Peloponnese or Kythira. Kissamos is a rural working town that neither expects nor attracts much tourism, though many small family hotels have sprouted in recent years. While it is not immediately appealing, it is worth more than a passing glance. The huge Kissamos Bay has some fine pebble and sand beaches, and the almost bucolic feel of the region is a welcome antidote to the bustling Crete further east. There's a string of waterfront tavernas and bars lining the seafront promenade but the place only ever gets busy in August. Kissamos is a good base for walking, touring and un-winding. Cruises to the Gramvousa Peninsula (p501) leave from Kissamos port.

In antiquity, Kissamos was the main town of the province of the same name. When the Venetians came and built a castle here, it became known as Kastelli (the name persisted until 1966 when authorities decided that too many people were confusing it with Crete's other Kastelli, near Iraklio). Parts of the castle wall survive to the west of Plateia Tzanakaki.

## Orientation & Information

The port is 3km west of town. From June through August a bus meets the boats; otherwise a taxi costs around €4. The

bus station is on the main square, Plateia Tzanakaki; and the main commercial street, Skalidi, runs east from Plateia Tzanakaki.

Kissamos has a reasonably informative website, [www.kissamos.net](http://www.kissamos.net). The post office is on the main through-road, while there are banks with ATMs along Skalidi.

## Sights & Activities

**Archaeological Museum of Kissamos** (☎ 28220 83308; Plateia Tzanakaki; ☎ 8.30am-3pm; free admission). This new museum in an imposing Venetian-Turkish building on the main square has a well-displayed collection of artefacts unearthed during archaeological digs in the area, including statues, jewellery, coins and a large mosaic floor from a Kissamos villa.

**Strata Walking Tours** (☎ 28220 24336; [www.strata-tours.com](http://www.strata-tours.com)) offers a range of walking tours for small groups, from leisurely day-trips (€40 including lunch) to full-on 15-day round trips (€895) to the south coast. It also runs jeep safaris to interesting off-road destinations (€40).

## Sleeping

**Bikakis Family** (☎ 28220 22105; [www.familybikakis.gr](http://www.familybikakis.gr); Iroön Polemiston 1941; s/d/studio €20/25/30; ☎ ☎) A great budget option, these rooms and studios sparkle and most have garden and sea views, kitchenettes and extras such as TV, hairdryers and free internet. It maintains a family environment and friendly owner Giannis is a font of local knowledge. There are adjoining rooms for families.

**Thalassa** (☎ 28220 31231; [www.thalassa-apts.gr](http://www.thalassa-apts.gr); Paralia Drapanias; studios €35-55; ☎ ☎) This isolated complex is an ideal spot to retreat to with a stack of books. The immaculate studios are airy and well-fitted out with irons, hairdryers and ADSL and wi-fi connections. There's a barbecue on the lawn, a small playground and it's just across from the beach, 100m east of Camping Mithymna.

**Galini Beach** (☎ 28220 23288; r €38-48) At the eastern end of the beach next to the soccer ground, this well-maintained, friendly, family-run hotel has spacious rooms decorated in cool tones, some with kitchenette, as well as adjoining family rooms.

## Eating

**Kellari** (☎ 28220 23883; Cretan specials €3-7.50) This well-regarded taverna on the eastern end of the beach strip has an extensive range of

Cretan dishes, grills and fresh fish as well as a Greek tasting menu for two (€16). Owned by the same family that runs Strata Walking Tours, it uses its own meat, wine, oil and other produce.

**Papadakis** (☎ 28220 22340; mains €6-9.30) One of the oldest tavernas in town, this place is well patronised by local diners. The taverna has a very relaxing setting overlooking the beach and serves well-prepared fish dishes such as oven-baked fish (€6), or fish soup.

Also recommended for fine home cooking is **Violaki Estiatorio** on the main through road and **Akroyiali**, well signposted east of Kissamos, for excellent fresh fish on the beach.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

From Kissamos' **bus station** (☎ 28220 22035), there are 14 buses a day to Hania (€4, 40 minutes), where you can change for Rethymno and Iraklio; two buses a day for Falasarna (€3, 20 minutes); and one bus a day to Paleohora (€6.50, 1¼ hours) and Elafonisi (€5.90, 1¼ hours).

### FERRY

ANEN Ferries operates the *F/B Myrtiliotissa* on weekends on a route that takes in Antikythira (€9.40, two hours), Kythira (€16.40, four hours) and Gythio (€22.10, five hours). You can buy tickets from **Horeftakis Tours** (☎ 28220 23250) and the **ANEN Office** (☎ 28220 22009; Skalidi).

## Getting Around

**Moto Fun** (☎ 28220 23440; [www.motofun.info](http://www.motofun.info); Plateia Tzanakaki) rents cars, bikes and mountain bikes.

## AROUND KISSAMOS

**Falasarna** Φαλάσαρνα  
pop 21

Falasarna, 16km west of Kissamos, was a Cretan city-state in the 4th century BC but there's not much of the ancient city left to see. It attracts a mixed bunch of travellers due to its long, wide stretch of sandy beach, which is considered one of the best in Crete. It is split up into several coves by rocky spits and is known for its stunning sunsets and the pink hues reflecting from the fine coral in the sand. There is no village, just a scattering of widely spaced rooms and tavernas

among the greenhouses that somewhat mar the approach to the beach.

**Rooms Anastasia-Stathis** (☎ 28220 41480; fax 28220 41069; d/apt €40/50; ☎) Owner Anastasia makes her home the friendliest place to stay. The airy rooms with fridges and large balconies are perfect for stress relief, as Anastasia puts it. Her enormous breakfasts (€6) are open to all comers and are a sight to be savoured.

**Galasia Thea** (☎ 28220 41421; *mayirefta* €4.50-6) On the cliff overlooking the great expanse of beach, this place has spectacular views from its huge terrace. There's a big range of baked dishes and *mayirefta* such as the Sfakiano lemon lamb.

From June through August there are three buses daily from Kissamos to Falasarna (€3) as well as three buses from Hania (€6.50).

## Gramvousa Peninsula Χερσόνησος Γραμβούσας

North of Falasarna is the wild and remote Gramvousa Peninsula and the stunning sandy beach of **Balos** on the west side of the peninsula's narrow tip. The idyllic beach is overlooked by the two islets of **Agria** (wild) and **Imeri** (tame).

The rough but drivable dirt road (best in a 4WD) to Balos begins at the end of the main street of **Kalyviani** village. The road ends at a car park (with a *kantina*) from where the path to the beach is a 30-minute walk down the sandy cliffs (45 minutes on the way back up).

West-bound buses from Kissamos will let you off at the turn-off for Kalyviani, from where it is a 2km walk to the beginning of the path at the far end of the main street. The shadeless walk to Balos is around 3km – wear a hat and take plenty of water. An easier way to get there is via one of the three daily **cruises** (☎ 28220 24344; [www.gramvousa.com](http://www.gramvousa.com); adult/concession €22/12; ☎ 55mins) The morning boats stop at Imeri Gramvousa, which is crowned with a **Venetian castle**. Departures are at 10am, 10.15am and 1pm and return trips at 5.45pm and 8pm. The trip can be rough if it is windy.

## EASTERN CRETE

Lasithi, Crete's easternmost prefecture, may receive far fewer visitors than the rest of the island, but the exclusive resorts around Elounda and Agios Nikolaos are the strong-

hold of Crete's high-end tourism. Agios Nikolaos is the region's contribution to the party scene. The fertile Lasithi Plateau, tucked in the Mt Dikti ranges, provides excellent cycling opportunities through quiet rural villages to the Dikteon Cave, where legend has it that Zeus was born. The east's other main attractions are the famous palm forest and beach at Vai and the remote Minoan palace of Zakros.

## LASITHI PLATEAU ΟΡΟΠΕΔΙΟ ΛΑΣΙΘΙΟΥ

The Lasithi Plateau, 900m above sea level, is a vast expanse of pear and apple orchards, almond trees and fields of crops. It would have been a stunning sight when it was dotted by some 20,000 metal windmills with white canvas sails. They were built in the 17th century to irrigate the rich farmland but there are less than 5000 still standing today and few of the original windmills are in service; most having been replaced by less attractive mechanical pumps.

The plateau's rich soil has been cultivated since Minoan times. The inaccessibility of the region made it a hotbed of insurrection during Venetian and Turkish rule. Following an uprising in the 13th century, the Venetians drove out the inhabitants of Lasithi and destroyed their orchards. The plateau lay abandoned for 200 years. Food shortages led the Venetians to cultivate the area and build the irrigation trenches and wells that still service the region.

There are 20 villages dotted around the periphery of the plateau, the largest of which is **Tzermiado** (population 747), with a couple of ATMs and a post office. The town sees a fair amount of tourism from the tour buses going to the Dikteon Cave.

The **Restaurant Kourites** (☎ 28440 22054; [www.kourites.eu](http://www.kourites.eu)) serves excellent Cretan cuisine, including many vegetarian delights. Try some of the wood oven dishes – the suckling pig with baked potatoes is delicious. There are simple rooms (single/double including breakfast €25/40) above the taverna with small balconies and you have free use of the bicycles. The same family also runs the lovely **Argoulis** (☎ 28440 22754; [www.argoulis.gr](http://www.argoulis.gr); d incl breakfast €60-80) complex of stone-built spacious apartments built into the hillside in the abandoned top part of the village, with panoramic views.

In the relaxing village of **Agios Georgios** (pronounced *agh-ios ye-or-gios*; population 554), **Hotel Maria** (☎ 28440 31774; s/d €20/25) has nicely decorated rooms with weavings and traditional furnishings (although larger people should note that the beds are very narrow). Maria also does the cooking at **Taverna Rea** (☎ 28440 31209; mains €4.50-6.50) on the main street.

**Psyhro** is the closest village to the Dikteon Cave. Its main street has a few tavernas, and plenty of souvenir shops selling 'authentic' rugs and mats of non-Cretan origin. It is prettier and less dusty than Tzermiado and makes for a better rest stop. Buses to Psyhro drop you at the end of the town where it's about a kilometre walk uphill to the cave.

**Petros Taverna** (☎ 28440 31600; grills €6), opposite the entrance to the cave, is run by former cave guardian Petros Zarvakis. It has great views from the balcony. He also organises regular hikes up to Mt Dikti, camping out under the stars.

### Dikteon Cave Δικταίων Αντρον

Lasithi's major sight is the **Dikteon Cave** (adult/child €4/2; ☎ 8am-6pm Jun-Oct, 8am-2.30pm Nov-May), just outside Psyhro. Here, according to legend, Rhea hid the newborn Zeus from Cronos, his offspring-gobbling father.

The cave covers 2200 sq metres and features both stalactites and stalagmites. It was excavated in 1900 by the British archaeologist David Hogarth, who found numerous votives indicating it was a place of cult worship (on display in the archaeological museum in Iraklio; see p466 for more information).

It is a steep 15-minute (800m) walk up to the cave entrance. You can take the fairly rough but shaded track on the right with great views over the plateau or the unshaded paved trail on the left of the car park next to the Chalavro taverna. You can also let a donkey do the hard work (€10 or €15 return).

### Getting There & Away

From Iraklio there are daily buses to Tzermiado (€3.50, two hours), Agios Georgios (€4.70, two hours) and Psyhro. There are also buses to the villages from Agios Nikolaos.

### AGIOS NIKOLAOS ΑΓΙΟΣ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ

pop 10,080  
Lasithi's capital, Agios Nikolaos (*ah-ye-eos nih-ko-laos*), is an undeniably attractive former fishing village set around a pleasant

harbour and a small, picturesque lake connected to the sea.

In the early 1960s it became a chic hideaway for the likes of Jules Dassin and Walt Disney, but by the end of the decade, package tourists were arriving in force and it became an overdeveloped tourist town. It's had its ups and downs ever since.

'Agios' remains popular, drawing people from nearby resorts at night when the ambience turns more vibrant and cosmopolitan. While there is superficially little to attract the independent traveller, there is reasonable accommodation, prices are not too horrendous and there is enough activity to cater for all tastes.

### Orientation

The **bus station** (KTEL; ☎ 28410 22234) has been rather inconveniently relocated to the north-western side of town, about 800m from the town's centre at Plateia Venizelou. The de facto town centre is around the Voulismeni Lake. Most banks, ATMs, travel agencies and shops are on Koundourou and the parallel 28 Oktovriou.

### Information

**Anna Karteri Bookshop** (☎ 28410 22272; Koundourou 5) Well stocked with maps, guide books, literature in English and other languages.

**General Hospital** (☎ 28410 66000; Knosu 3) On the west side of town.

**Municipal Tourist Office** (☎ 28410 22357; www.agiosnikolaos.gr; ☎ 8am-9pm Apr-Nov) Right by the bridge; changes money and assists with accommodation.

**National Bank of Greece** (Nikolaou Plastira) Has a 24-hour exchange machine.

**PK's Internet Cafe** (☎ 28410 28004; Akti Koundourou 1; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-2am) Has full printing, burning, Skype and video cams set up.

**Post office** (☎ 28410 22062; 28 Oktovriou 9; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

**Tourist Police** (☎ 28410 91408; Erythrou Stavrou 47; ☎ 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

### Sights

It is well-worth the hike up the hill to the **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 28410 24943; Paleologou Konstantinou 74; admission €4; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun; ☎ ), which has an extensive and well-displayed collection from eastern Crete. While it has no major showpiece, it is probably the second most significant Minoan collection and includes clay coffins, ceramic musical



instruments and gold from the island of Mohlos. The exhibits are arranged in chronological order beginning with Neolithic finds from Mt Tragistalos, north of Kato Zakros, and early Minoan finds from Agia Fotia, then finds from Malia and Mohlos. The highlight is the odd-looking *Goddess of Myrtos*, a clay jug from 2500 BC found near Myrtos.

The **folk museum** (☎ 28410 25093; Paleologou Konstantinou 4; admission €3; ☎ 10am-2pm Tue-Sun), next to the municipal tourist office, has a small, well-displayed collection of traditional handicrafts and costumes.

The town beaches of **Ammos** and **Kytoplatia Beach** are smallish and can get rather crowded. The sandy beach at **Almyros** about 1km south of town is the best of the lot and tends to be less crowded than the others. It can be reached on foot via a coastal path starting at the end of the road just past the stadium.

**Ammoudara Beach**, 1.5km further south along the road to Ierapetra, is a little better and supports a fairly busy restaurant and accommodation scene. Or you can venture further along the coastal road towards Sitia to pleasant coves with long stretches of sandy beach and turquoise waters at **Golden Beach** (Voulisma Beach) and around **Istron Bay**.

## Tours

Boat trips to Spinalonga (€17) include a swim stop on the Kolokytha Peninsula **Minotours Hellas** (☎ 28410 23222; www.minotours.gr; 28 Oktovriou 6) has a range of tours, including guided coach tours of Phaestos, Gortys and Matala (€33), the Samaria Gorge (€45), the Lasithi Plateau (€34) and Knossos (€30).

## Sleeping

### BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Pension Mary** (☎ 28410 23760; Evans 13; s/d/tr €15/25/30; ☎) This is one of those friendly places where the owner lives downstairs and bonus home-made sweets are almost guaranteed. The rooms are basic but clean and most have private bathrooms, fridge, balconies with some sea views and access to a communal kitchen. The top room is cramped but has a private terrace with barbecue. Breakfast is €5.

**Pergola Hotel** (☎/fax 28410 28152; Sarolidi 20; d with view €20-40; ☎) This family-run hotel has a homey feel. Rooms are comfortable and all have fridges, TV and air-con. There is a pleasant veranda under a pergola to relax or have breakfast. Front rooms have balconies

and sea views. The owners can pick you up from the bus station.

**Mylos Pension** (☎ 28410 23783; Sarolidi 24; d €40; ☎) From the fake flowers on the bed to the family photos and icons on the walls, this quaint pension is an extension of the friendly elderly owner's home. The front rooms have sensational views (try for room 2) and all have a fridge and TV. The sprightly Georgia swears by the hard mattresses.

**Du Lac Hotel** (☎ 28410 22711; www.dulachotel.gr; 28 Oktovriou 17; s/d/studio €40/60/80; ☎) This refurbished hotel on the lake has standard rooms and spacious, fully fitted-out studios; both have stylish contemporary furnishings and nice bathrooms. It's in a great central location, with lovely views over the lake.

## TOP END

**Palazzo** (☎ 28410 25086; www.palazzo-apartments.gr; apt €90-110; ☎) Opposite Kytoplatia Beach, these classy apartments sleeping up to four people are the closest thing to a boutique hotel in town. It has 10 charming apartments with mosaic-tiled floors and marble bathrooms, and the front rooms have lovely balconies with views. There's free email downstairs.

## Eating

The lakeside restaurants, while visually tempting, tend to serve bland and often overpriced 'tourist' Greek food. Head further afield for the genuine article.

**Taverna Itanos** (☎ 28410 25340; Kyprou 1; mayirefta €4-9) This place is popular with locals wanting traditional home-style Cretan cooking. You can pick from the trays of excellent *mayirefta*, such as goat with artichokes or lamb fricassée.

**Pelagos** (☎ 28410 25737; Katehaki 10; mezedhes €4-8.50) For an excellent selection of fresh fish and seafood, this place, in a beautifully restored house with ambient garden, is generally considered the best (and priciest) restaurant in Agios Nikolaos. The mezedhes are excellent.

**Aouas Taverna** (☎ 28410 23231; Paleologou Konstantinou 44; mezedhes €5.20-9.60) This family-run place on the road to the museum has a range of Cretan specialities such as herb pies and pickled bulbs, as well as tasty grills. The interior is plain but the enclosed garden is refreshing and the mezedhes are good.

**Barko** (☎ 28410 24610; Akti Pagalou 8; Cretan dishes €8.50-13.80) Has gone upmarket since moving to flashier premises on Kytoplatia Beach.

There are still excellent Cretan-style dishes but the menu includes more creative Mediterranean-style cuisine such as a light risotto with pumpkin and *anthotyro* (Cretan cream-cheese). There's a decent wine list.

Also recommended as a good budget option is the colourful Catalano-Mediterranean combo at **Pantomaca** (☎ 28410 82394; Paleologou 52; 7pm-midnight).

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Buses leave from Agios Nikolaos' bus station (☎ 28410 22234) for Elounda (€1.30, 16 daily), Ierapetra (€3.30, eight daily), Iraklio (€6.20, half-hourly), Kritsa (€1.30, 10 daily) Lasithi Plateau (€3.50, two daily) and Sitia (€5.90, seven daily).

### FERRY

**LANE Lines** (☎ 28410 89150; www.lane.gr) has ferries two times a week from Agios Nikolaos to Piraeus (€34, cabin €46, 14 hours), via Santorini (five hours, €20.20) and Milos (nine hours, €20.60). There is also a service from Piraeus via Milos to Agios Nikolaos, Sitia, Kasos, Karpathos, Halki and Rhodes.

## Getting Around

**Club Cars** (☎ 28410 25868; www.clubcars.net; 28 Oktovriou 30) rents cars from €32 per day and **Manolis** (☎ 28410 24940; 25 Martiou 12) has a huge range of scooters, motorcycles, quad bikes and top of the range mountain bikes.

## ELOUNDA EAOYNTA

### pop 1655

There are magnificent mountain and sea views along the 11km road north from Agios Nikolaos to Elounda (el-oon-da). A cluster of luxury resorts occupy the lovely coves along the coast. The first elite hotel was built here in the mid-1960s, quickly establishing Elounda as the playground for Greece's glitterati and high flyers – soon after, the world's rich and famous followed suit. Elounda boasts some of the most exclusive resorts in Greece.

Past the resorts, the once-quiet fishing village of Elounda now bristles with package tourists, though it's quieter than neighbouring Agios Nikolaos. Busloads of day-trippers rock up on their way to Spinalonga Island. The pleasant but unremarkable sandy town beach, to the north of the port, can get very

crowded. Elounda has limited appeal unless you are lucky enough to be staying in one of the posh resorts. While there are some nice places around, Elounda is not particularly good value in peak season and many hotels are booked out by tour operators.

## Information

**Municipal Tourist Office** (☎ 28410 42464; ☎ 8am-11pm Jun-Oct), on the main square, helps with accommodation and information, and changes money.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Aristeia** (☎ 28410 41300; www.aristeahotel.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast €30/45/55; ☎) In the town centre is this uninspiring but decent and clean budget option. Most rooms at least have a sea view, double-glazed windows, TV, fridge and hairdryers.

**Coral Studios** (☎/fax 28410 41712; www.coralstudios.com; studio €60-70; ☎) On the northern side, about 800m from the clock tower, these handy self-catering studios are set in lush lawns with a shaded patio. Next door and under the same management the spacious apartments at **Portobello Apartments** (2-/4-bed apt €65-75; ☎) are a good option for two or three people.

**Elounda Island Villas** (☎ 28410 41274; www.elounda.island.gr; d from €70; 4-person r €105; ☎ P) are a secluded option on Kolokytha island, reached along a narrow peninsula. The apartments are set amid a pleasant garden and decorated with traditional furnishings. Kitchens are well-equipped, bathrooms functional and there are split-level living and sleeping areas. There is an attached tavern and it's a 20-minute walk into town.

## Eating

**Nikos** (☎ 28410 41439; fish per kg €35-40) While it lacks the ambience of the seafront eateries, no-frills Nikos on the main street is a good choice for fish and lobster because they generally catch their own. Service can be erratic but the food is good value.

**Ferryman** (☎ 28410 41230; local fish platter for 2 €44) With a lovely setting on the waterfront, the Ferryman claims its moment of fame from being featured in the TV series *Who Pays the Ferryman*. The food and service is excellent (they even clean the fish for you), though it is on the pricey side. Its speciality is fish and lobster, but there's a broader menu of Cretan specialities.

**Megaro** (☎ 28419 42220; top fish per kg €45; mains €4-8) This recently refurbished place on the corner of the square is popular with locals around the district. The owner is a fisherman and the menu also includes Cretan specials.

### Getting There & Away

Boats go across to Spinalonga every half-hour (adult/child €10/5). There are 13 buses daily from Agios Nikolaos to Elounda (€1.30, 20 minutes).

### SPINALONGA ISLAND ΝΗΣΟΣ ΣΠΙΝΑΛΟΓΚΑΣ

Spinalonga Island lies just north of the Kolokytha Peninsula. The island's massive **fortress** (☎ 28410 41773; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm) was built by the Venetians in 1579 to protect Elounda Bay and the Gulf of Mirabello. It withstood Turkish sieges for longer than any other Cretan stronghold, finally surrendering in 1715, some 30 years after the rest of Crete. The Turks used the island as a base for smuggling. Following the reunion of Crete with Greece, Spinalonga Island became a leper colony. The last leper died here in 1953 and the island has been uninhabited ever since. It is still known among locals as 'the island of the living dead.' The island is a fascinating place to explore. It has an aura that is both macabre and poignant.

Regular excursion boats visit Spinalonga from Agios Nikolaos (€17) with Minotours Hellas (see p504); ferries leave from Elounda (€10) or you could also take a cheaper boat from Plaka (5km further north).

### KRITSA ΚΡΙΤΣΑ

pop 1614

The village of Kritsa (*krit-sah*), perched 600m up the mountainside 11km from Agios Nikolaos, is a pretty mountain village renowned for its strong tradition of needlework and weaving. The village has morphed into a bit of a tourist attraction, with busloads of day trippers swarming through the streets all summer and villagers are eager to exploit these invasions to the full. It creates a colourful atmosphere but not much of the stuff on sale is handmade these days and few of the rug designs are authentic. It's still possible to find the traditional geometric designs of Crete and the odd finely crocheted blankets and tablecloths, but they are becoming a rarity.

On the way to Kritsa, about 1km before the village, it is worth stopping at the tiny, triple-aisled **Church of Panagia Kera** (☎ 28410 51525; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat). The frescoes that cover its interior walls are considered the most outstanding examples of Byzantine art in Crete.

The taverna/*kafeneio* **Platanos** (☎ 2841051230; mains €4.80-6.50) retains a traditional feel and has a lovely setting under a giant plane tree and vine canopy. There's a standard menu but it's well regarded by locals.

There are hourly buses from Agios Nikolaos to Kritsa (€1.30, 15 minutes).

### ANCIENT LATO ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΛΑΤΩ

The ancient city of **Lato** (admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), 4km north of Kritsa, is one of Crete's few non-Minoan ancient sites. Lato (*lah-to*) was founded in the 7th century BC by the Dorians and at its height was one of the most powerful cities in Crete. It sprawls over the slopes of two acropolises in a lonely mountain setting, commanding stunning views down to the Gulf of Mirabello.

The city's name derived from the goddess Leto whose union with Zeus produced Artemis and Apollo, both of whom were worshipped here.

In the centre of the site is a deep well, which is cordoned off. As you face the Gulf of Mirabello, to the left of the well are some steps which are the remains of a **theatre**.

Above the theatre was the **prytaneion**, where the city's governing body met. The circle of stones behind the well was a threshing floor. The columns next to it are the remains of a stoa which stood in the agora. There are remains of a pebble mosaic nearby. A path to the right leads up to the **Temple of Apollo**.

There are no buses to Lato. The road to the site is signposted to the right on the approach to Kritsa. If you don't have your own transport, it's a pleasant 4km walk through olive groves.

### GOURNIA ΓΟΥΡΝΙΑ

The important Minoan site of **Gournia** (☎ 28410 24943; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), pronounced *goor-nyah*, lies just off the coast road, 19km southeast of Agios Nikolaos. The ruins, which date from 1550 to 1450 BC, consist of a town overlooked by a small palace. The palace was far less ostentatious than the ones at Knossos and Phaestos, because it was

the residence of an overlord rather than a king. The town is a network of streets and stairways flanked by houses with walls up to 2m in height. Trade, domestic and agricultural implements found on the site indicate Gournia was a thriving little community.

Gournia is on the Sitia and Ierapetra bus routes from Agios Nikolaos and buses can drop you at the site.

### MOHLOS ΜΟΧΛΟΣ

pop 91

Mohlos (*moh-los*) is a pretty fishing village reached by a 5km winding road from the Sitia-Agios Nikolaos highway. In antiquity, it was joined to the eponymous island that now sits 200m offshore and was once a thriving Early Minoan community dating from the period 3000-2000 BC. Excavations still continue sporadically on both Mohlos Island and at Mohlos village. A short description of the archaeology of the area is presented on an information board overlooking the tiny harbour.

Mohlos is a chill-out place with simple accommodation, plenty of good walks and interesting villages to explore nearby. There is a small pebble-and-grey-sand beach where swimming is reasonable. Beware of strong currents further out in the small strait between the island and the village.

The tavernas enjoy a good reputation for fresh local fish and seafood, and attract many Cretans on weekends.

There are few facilities other than a couple of gift shops and a minimarket. There was, however, at the time of researching this book, an ominous construction frenzy evident nearby that did not bode well for peaceful Mohlos.

**Hotel Sofia** (☎/fax 28430 94554; r€35-45; ☎) The rooms above the taverna have been spruced up with new furniture and bedding, and all have TV and fridge, but are rather cramped. The front rooms have balconies with sea views. Try the excellent home cooking at the taverna.

**Kyma** (☎ 28430 94177; soik@in.gr; studio €30) Fairly well signposted on the village's western side near a supermarket, the self-contained studios are spotless and good value.

**Ta Kochilia** (☎ 28430 94432; Cretan specials €4.50-6.50) This excellent place has superb views and is known for its fresh fish and simple, good food. Seafood lovers should try the sea-urchin

salad - dip your bread in it or the cuttlefish in black ink.

Also recommended is **To Bogazi** (☎ 28430 94200; mezedhes €2.50-6.50).

There is no public transport to Mohlos. Buses between Sitia and Agios Nikolaos will drop you off at the Mohlos turn-off. From there you'll need to hitch or walk the 6km to Mohlos village.

### SITIA ΣΗΤΕΙΑ

pop 8238

Sitia (*si-tee-ah*) is quieter than the prefecture capital Agios Nikolaos, though it can get busy in summer with a mainly domestic crowd. While the town is traveller-friendly, it exists for the locals, who live from agriculture and commerce rather than tourism.

A sandy beach skirts a wide bay to the east of town. The main town is terraced up a hillside, overlooking the port. It has a pleasing mixture of new and fading Venetian architecture, while its attractive harbour-side promenade lined with tavernas and cafés makes for a pleasant evening stroll. Even at the height of the season the town has a relatively laid-back feel compared with the commercialism further west. It also makes a good jumping-off point for the Dodecanese.

### Orientation & Information

The town's main square is Plateia Iroon Polytehnou. There are ATMs and places to change money in town. The bus station is at the eastern end of Karamanli, which runs behind the bay. Ferries dock about 500m north of Plateia Agnostou.

**Akasti Travel** (☎ 28430 29444; www.akasti.gr; Kornarou & Metaxaki 4) Good source of information.

**Java Internet Cafe** (☎ 28430 22263; Kornarou 113; ☎ 9am-late).

**National Bank of Greece** (Plateia Iroon Polytehnou) Has a 24-hour exchange machine.

**Post office** (Dimokritou; ☎ 7.30am-3pm) To get here, follow El Venizelou inland and take the first left.

**Tourist office** (☎ 28430 28300; Karamanli; ☎ 9.30am-2.30pm & 5-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat) On the promenade; has town maps.

### Sights

Sitia's excellent **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 28430 23917; Piskokefalou; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) houses a well-displayed and important collection of local finds spanning Neolithic to Roman times, with emphasis on the Minoan



civilisation. One of the most significant exhibits is the *Palekastro Kouros* – a figure pieced together from fragments made of hippopotamus tusks and adorned with gold. The finds from the palace at Zakros include a wine press, bronze saw, jars, cult objects and pots that are clearly scorched from the great fire that destroyed the palace. Among the most valuable objects in the museum are the Linear A tablets which reflect the palace's administrative function.

Towering over the town is the fort or **ka-zarma** (from 'casa di arma') which was a garrison under the Venetians. The only remains of the wall that once protected the town, the site is now used as an open-air venue. It's open 8.30am to 3pm.

The **folklore museum** (☎ 28430 22861; Kapetan Sifinos 28; admission €2; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) displays a fine collection of local weavings.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Arhontiko** (☎ 28430 28172; Kondylaki 16; d/studio without bathroom €30/33) This guesthouse, in a beautifully maintained neoclassical building uphill from the port, has a real old-world feel. It's spotless, with shared bathrooms and a lovely shady garden in the front; the top rooms have sea views.

**Apostolis** (☎ 28430 28172; Kazantzaki 27; d/tr €37/47) These domatia have ceiling fans and relatively modern bathrooms with handy touches such as shower curtains. There's a communal balcony and fridge.

**El Greco Hotel** (☎ 28430 23133; elgreco@sit.forth.net.gr; Arkadiou 13; s/d with breakfast €35/50; ☎) The quaint El Greco has very clean and presentable rooms, and all have a fridge, phone and extras like hairdryers (some sleep up to four).

**Hotel Flisvos** (☎ 28430 27135; www.flisvos-sitia.com; Karamanli 4; s/d/tr from €40/50/60; ☎) Along the southern waterfront, Flisvos is a decent modern hotel. Rooms are neat and have air-con, TV, fridge, phone and balconies; there is a recently renovated back wing with more spacious rooms and a lift.

Also recommended are the more upmarket **Sitia Bay Hotel Apartments** (☎ 28430 24800; www.sitia-bay.com; Tritis Septemvriou 8; apt/ste from €110/160; ☎).

## Eating

**Sitia Beach** (☎ 28430 22104; Karamanli 28; specials €5.50-8) is an unassuming place on the beach that makes a decent pizza but it is more highly

recommended for home-style cooking that appears daily on the specials board.

**Taverna O Mihos** (☎ 28430 22416; Kornarou 117; mixed grill for 2 €20) This *psistaria* (restaurant serving grilled food) in a traditional stone house one block back from the waterfront has excellent charcoal-grilled meats as well as Cretan cooking. There are also tables on a terrace nearby on the beach.

**Balcony** (☎ 28430 25084; Foundalidou 19; mains €10.60-18.80) The finest dining in Sitia is on the 1st floor of this charmingly decorated neoclassical building. The Balcony has an eclectic menu of fusion cuisine, from Cretan to Mexican and Asian-inspired dishes from the charmingly feisty owner/chef Tonya's travels. Service can be patchy.

For a more classic local experience try the old **Houlis Rakadiko** (☎ 28430 28298; Venizelou 57) for a wide range of mezedhes accompanied by good *raki*. It has no signage, but it's second from the corner – by day you'll see it packed with men playing backgammon.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Sitia's **airport** (☎ 28430 24666) opened an expanded international-size runway in 2003, but international flights had yet to operate in 2007.

**Olympic Airlines** (☎ 28430 22270; www.olympicairlines.com; 4 Septemvriou 3) has four weekly flights to Athens (€71, one hour), Alexandroupolis (€80, two hours), three flights a week to Preveza (€80, two hours and 20 minutes) and daily flights to Kos (20 minutes), Karpathos (one hour) and Rhodes (€47, two hours).

### BUS

From Sitia's **bus station** (☎ 28430 22272) there are six buses a day to Ierapetra (€5.40, 1½ hours), seven buses a day to Iraklio (€13.10, three hours) via Agios Nikolaos (€6.90, 1½ hours), four to Vai (€3, ½ hour), and two to Kato Zakros via Palekastro and Zakros (€4.50, one hour). Buses to Vai and Kato Zakros run only between May and October.

### FERRY

**LANE Lines** (☎ 28430 25555; www.lane.gr) has weekly ferries from Sitia to Rhodes via Kos (€19.50, six hours), Karpathos (€19.50, eight hours), Diafani (€17.90, nine hours), Halki (€18.20, 11 hours) and Rhodes (€27, 14 hours).

Departure times change annually, so check locally for latest information.

## AROUND SITIA

### Moni Toplou Μονή Τοπλού

The imposing **Moni Toplou** (☎ 28430 61226; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct), 18km east of Sitia on the road to Vai, looks more like a fortress than a monastery. It was often treated as such, being ravaged by both the Knights of St John and the Turks. Its star attraction is an 18th-century icon by Ioannis Kornaros, with 61 small beautiful scenes inspired by an Orthodox prayer.

An excellent **museum** has a fine collection of icons, engravings and books, as well as weapons and military souvenirs from the Resistance. The well-stocked shop sells ecclesiastical souvenirs and books on Crete, plus the monastery's award-winning organic olive oil and wine.

The monastery is a 3km walk from the Sitia-Palekastro road. Buses can drop you off at the junction.

### Vai Βαϊ

The beach at Vai, on Crete's east coast 24km from Sitia, is famous for its palm forest. There are many stories about the origin of these palms, including the theory that they sprouted from date pits spread by Roman legionaries relaxing on their way back from conquering Egypt. While these palms are closely related to the date, they are a separate species unique to Crete.

In July and August you'll need to arrive early to appreciate the setting, because the place gets packed. It's possible to escape the worst of the ballyhoo – jet skis and all – by clambering over a rocky outcrop behind the taverna to a secluded beach.

About 3km north is the ancient Minoan site of **Itanos**. Below the site are several good swimming spots.

There are buses to Vai from Sitia (€2.50, one hour, five daily) that stop at Palekastro. The car park charges €3, but there's free parking on the roadside 500m before Vai.

## PALEKASTRO ΠΑΛΑΙΚΑΣΤΡΟ

### pop 1084

Palekastro (pah-leh-kas-tro) is a small farming town in the midst of a rocky, barren landscape, but within easy striking distance

of the lovely Kouremenos Beach, Vai Beach and Moni Toplou. About 1km from town is the small archaeological site of Ancient Palekastro, where archaeologists believe a major Minoan Palace is buried. Excavations continue on the site, which uncovered the *Palekastro Kouros* now residing in the Archaeological Museum in Sitia (p507).

The **tourist office** (☎ 28430 61546; ☎ 9am-10pm May-Oct) is also a good source of information. There's an ATM next door.

**Hotel Hellas** (☎ 28430 61240; hellas\_h@otenet.gr; s/d €30-45; ☎) has simple rooms with a fridge and updated bathrooms, while downstairs at the taverna you'll find hearty home-style cooking (specials €4 to €6.90).

The closest beaches to Palekastro are **Kouremenos**, a nearly deserted pebble beach with excellent windsurfing and **Hiona Beach**, which has some fine fish tavernas.

You can rent boards from **Freak Surf Station** (☎ 28430 61116; www.freak-surf.com) on the beach.

At Kouremenos Beach, **Casa di Mare** (☎ 28430 25304; casadimare@hotmail.com; studio €40-60; ☎) has six spacious, comfortable studios with stone floors and rustic-style décor that sleep up to four. There's a small pool among the olive groves.

There are five buses a day from Sitia that stop at Palekastro on the way to Vai. The are also two buses daily from Sitia to Palekastro (€2.20, 45 minutes) that continue to Kato Zakros (€4.50).

## KATO ZAKROS ΚΑΤΩ ΖΑΚΡΟΣ

### pop 793

The village of Zakros (*zah-kros*), 37km southeast of Sitia, is the nearest permanent settlement to the Minoan site of Zakros, a further 7km away next to the peaceful beach settlement Kato Zakros (*kah-to zah-kros*). Little more than a long stretch of pebbly beach shaded by pine trees with a string of welcoming tavernas, it is just about the most tranquil place to stay on Crete's southeastern coast.

The settlement is unlikely ever to expand thanks to restrictions imposed by the archaeological service. There are several great walks in the area, including a not-too-challenging 8km walk from Zakros through a gorge, known as the **Valley of the Dead** because of the cave tombs dotted along the cliffs. The gorge emerges close to the Minoan site.

## Sleeping

**Stella's Apartments** (☎ /fax 28430 23739; www.stelapts.com; studio €40-75) are charming studios in a verdant, pine-tinged setting 800m along the old road to Zakros. Decorated with wooden furniture made by the owner, they have barbecues and hammocks and are perfect for longer stays. The engaging owners can take guests on treks and walks.

Four good places are managed by Nikos at the **Akrogiali Taverna** (☎ 28430 26893; www.katozakros.cretefamilyhotels.com). The taverna is at the far end of the beach, as are all of the rooms except Katerina Apartments.

**Athena & Coral Rooms** (d €40-50; ☺) Athena has pleasant rooms with stone walls, while Coral next door has small but spotless rooms with a fridge and sea views from the communal balcony.

**Katerina Apartments** (apt €40-60; ☺) Comfortable, large, stone-built studios and maisonettes with superb views. Opposite Stella's.

**Poseidon Rooms** (d with/without bathroom €25/20) Basic budget rooms right on the beach.

## Eating

There are a couple of good-quality rival tavernas along the beach.

**Restaurant Nikos Platanakis** (☎ 28430 26887; specials €4.50-7) This well-regarded restaurant has a wide range of Greek staples such as rabbit stew, as well as excellent grilled meat and fish. Most of the produce is from the massive vegetable garden out the back.

**Akrogiali Taverna** (☎ 28430 26893) Relaxed seaside dining and excellent service from the inimitable owner Nikos Perakis make this place a winner. The speciality is grilled swordfish steak (€9) and the *raki* is excellent.

## Getting There & Away

There are buses to Zakros from Sitia via Palekastro (one hour, €4.50, two daily). From June to August, the buses continue to Kato Zakros.

## ANCIENT ZAKROS ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΖΑΚΡΟΣ

The smallest of Crete's four palatial complexes, the **Palace of Zakros** (☎ 28430 26897; Kato Zakros; admission €3; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Jul-Oct, 8.30am-3pm Nov-Jun) was a major port in Minoan times, maintaining trade links with Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Cyprus. The palace comprised royal apartments, storerooms and workshops flanking a central courtyard.

The town occupied a low plain close to the shore. Water levels have risen over the years

so that some parts of the palace complex are submerged and are occupied by turtles. The ruins are not well preserved, but a visit to the site is worthwhile for its wild and remote setting.

## XEROKAMBOS ΞΕΡΟΚΑΜΠΟΣ

pop 34

Xerokambos (kse-ro-kam-bos) is a quiet, unassuming agricultural settlement on the far southeastern flank of Crete. Its isolation has so far meant that tourism is pretty much low-key and most certainly of the unpackaged kind. There are a couple of splendid beaches, a few scattered tavernas and a smattering of studio accommodation that is ideal for people wanting peace and quiet.

The smallish but cosy **Ambelos Beach Studios** (☎ /fax 28430 26759; studio €30-40) have basic kitchenettes, fridges and flyscreens. There is a barbecue and outdoor wood oven for guests, and a tree-shaded garden courtyard that makes it well-suited to families. It's just across from the beach.

**Villa Petrino** (☎ 28430 26702; d €40; ☺) has attractive, large, fully-equipped apartments, which are suitable for families, overlooking the garden. They have built-in beds, marble floors and the top rooms have beach views. The same management runs **Kostas Taverna** (specials €3-6), a well-regarded taverna that has a shady veranda with views out to sea. The multilingual owner Nikos is happy to show you the day's offering in the kitchen. Try the rabbit *rismarato* with rosemary and vinegar, served with hand-cut potatoes.

**Akrogiali Taverna** (☎ 28430 26777; mayirefta €4.50-8) is 50m from Ambelos Beach. Under new management, it does a range of mezedhes, grills and home-style specials like rabbit (in busy periods).

There are no buses to Xerokambos. From Zakros there's a signposted turn-off to Xerokambos, which becomes an 8km winding dirt road that is rough but drivable in a conventional vehicle (though it is slowly being asphalted). Otherwise there is a good paved road from Ziros.

## IERAPETRA ΙΕΡΑΠΕΤΡΑ

pop 11,678

Ierapetra (yeh-rah-pet-rah) is Europe's most southerly major town that services the surrounding farming region. It was a major port of call for the Romans in their conquest of

Egypt. Ierapetra's main business continues to be agriculture, as the greenhouses that mar the landscape along the coast will attest, rather than tourism. Despite its wealth, it is a largely unremarkable place and it attracts relatively few tourists. There are tavernas and cafés along the waterfront, a small Venetian fort on the harbour and the odd remnant of a Turkish quarter.

The town beach and surrounding beaches are good, the nightlife busy enough to keep you entertained and the scene is still Cretan enough to give you a less touristy experience of the island.

From Ierapetra you can visit the offshore, low-lying, sandy island of Gaïdouronisi (also known as Hrysi).

## Orientation & Information

The bus station is on the eastern side of town, one street back from the beachfront. There are ATMs around the main square.

**City Netcafe** (☎ 28420 23164; Kothri 6; per hr €2.50; ☎ 9am-late)

**Post office** (☎ 28420 22271; Vitsentzou Komarou 7; ☎ 7.30am-2pm)

[www.ierapetra.net](http://www.ierapetra.net) Helpful website.

## Sights & Activities

Ierapetra's one-room **archaeological museum** (☎ 28420 28721; Adrianou (Dimokratias) 2; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is perfect for those with a short concentration span. It does have a good collection of headless classical statuary and a superb statue of the goddess Persephone that dates from the 2nd century AD. Also notable is a *larnax*, or clay coffin, dating from around 1300 BC. The chest is decorated with 12 painted panels showing hunting scenes, an octopus and a chariot procession, among others. The 1899 building was a school during Ottoman times.

South along the waterfront from the central square is the 'Kales' **medieval fortress** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun), which was built in the early years of Venetian rule and strengthened by Francesco Morosini in 1626. It was in a pretty fragile condition and closed for restoration at the time of research.

The main **town beach** is near the harbour, while a second **beach** stretches east from the bottom of Patriarhou Metaxaki. Both have coarse, grey sand, but the main beach offers better shade.

## Sleeping

**Cretan Villa Hotel** (☎ /fax 28420 28522; www.cretan-villa.com; Lakerda 16; d €40/50; ☺) This well-maintained 18th-century house is the most atmospheric hotel in town. The traditionally furnished rooms have a fridge and TV, and there is a peaceful courtyard. It's a five-minute walk from the bus station. Rooms are cheaper without air-con.

**Ersi** (☎ 28420 23208; Plateia Eleftherias 19; d €30; ☺) This refurbished central hotel has neat rooms with a fridge, TV and sea views, though some are rather compact. It is run by the same family as **Coral Hotel** (☎ 28420 22846; Katzonovatsi 12; d €30), another reasonable budget option in a quiet pocket of the old town, as well as the larger fully-equipped **Coral Apartments** (Lambraki; €45-60) on the other side of town for families or longer stays.

## Eating

**Portego** (☎ 28420 27733; Foniadaki 8; mezedhes €3-5) This delightful restaurant serves excellent Cretan and Greek cuisine and has specials cooked in the wood-fired oven (so is its bread). Try the lamb in a clay pot with yogurt. It is housed in a historic 1900s house with a lovely courtyard for summer, and there is a cool bar and *kafeneio* attached if you just want a drink.

**Oi Kaliternes** (☎ 28420 28547; Kyprou 26; mains €4-7) is a colourful little place in a backstreet among hardware stores and tyre shops. It offers great-value organic food, home-made bread and some spicier falafel and kebabs introduced by the Egyptian owner.

**Napoleon** (☎ 28420 22410; Stratigou Samouil 26; mains €4.50-9) This is one of the oldest and most respected establishments. It's on the waterfront on the south side of town. There is fresh fish and Greek and Cretan specialities, but whatever you order is of a high quality.

Ierapetra has some excellent *rakadika*, relaxed evening hang-outs where a carafe of *raki* or wine comes with half a dozen or more tasty tid-bits. You could also try **To Kafeneio** opposite the town hall, or the modern **Pavlis**, near the port.

## Getting There & Away

There are nine buses a day from Ierapetra's **bus station** (☎ 28420 28237; Lasthenou) to Iraklio (€9.50, 2½ hours), via Agios Nikolaos (€3.30, one hour), and Gournia; seven to Sitia (€5.40,

1½ hours) via Koutsounari (for camp sites); and seven to Myrtos (€1.80, 30 minutes).

## GAÏDOURONISI (HRYSI) ΓΑΪΔΟΥΡΟΝΗΣΙ (ΧΡΥΣΗ)

Just off the coast of Ierapetra, you will find greater tranquillity at Gaïdouronisi (Donkey Island) – universally marketed in Ierapetra as Hrysi or Hrysi (Golden Island) – where there are good, sandy beaches, a taverna (alarmingly rumoured to be taken over by an incongruous chain snack store), and a stand of Lebanon cedars, the only one in Europe. It can get very crowded when the tour boats are in, but you can always find a quiet spot.

In summer, **excursion boats** (€15) leave from the quay near the town centre for the islet every morning and return in the afternoon.

## MYRTOS MYPTOΣ

pop 440

Myrtos (*myr-tos*), on the coast 17km west of Ierapetra, is popular with more mature European travellers who like the authentic village ambience. It is one of the few places with any character in this part of the south-

eastern coast, which is marred by greenhouses and haphazard unattractive beach developments. Myrtos has no big hotels, and there's a reasonable patch of beach and some decently priced places to stay and eat.

Internet is available at **Prima Tours** (☎ 28420 51035; www.sunbudget.net; per hr €3.50).

**Big Blue** (☎ 28420 51094; www.big-blue.gr; d/studio/apt €35/60/75; 🍷) on the western edge of town, has a choice of more expensive, large airy studios with sea views, or cheaper, ground-floor rooms. All have cooking facilities.

**Cretan Rooms** (☎ 28420 51427; d €35) are excellent traditional-styled rooms with balconies, fridges and shared kitchens, popular with independent travellers.

The reliable eating option is **Myrtos Taverna** (☎ 28420 51227; mayirefta €5-8), attached to the Myrtos hotel, which is popular with both locals and tourists for its wide range of mezedhes as well as vegetarian dishes.

**Platanos** (☎ 28420 51363; mains €4.50-8) seems to be the heartbeat of the town for foreigners, with tables under a giant thatched umbrella below a plane tree.

There are seven buses daily from Ierapetra to Myrtos (€1.80, 30 minutes).