



Hania Χανιά

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Why Go?

The west of Crete stands apart in so many ways. Full of big mountains, grandiose legends and memorials to great battles past, it is presided over by the preening (but slightly melancholic) port city of Hania, once Venice's jewel of a capital and full of arty boutique hotels, galleries and great eateries. But there's much more to this region: it boasts the grandest gorge in Europe, the continent's southernmost possession (tranquil Gavdos, a remote island nearer to Africa than Greece), and mountain villages hardly affected by modernity. The steep mountains that ripple across the west and into the southern sea guarantee that the region generally remains untouched by the excesses of tourism. The offbeat, sometimes gruff, but always hospitable west Cretans have stayed true to form too – from the olive oil to the moustachioed elders, if you want to see the traditional Crete, Hania and the west is definitely the place.

When to Go

Cretan summers are hot, hot, hot – if you're looking for buzzing crowds, nightlife and crowded beaches, come in July and August.

Spring is a great time to visit for outdoor activities, as the climate's temperate and the mountain wildflowers are in full splendour.

The autumn months are slightly quieter, but the weather is still lovely and the waters – having warmed all summer – are positively tropical, making September ideal for luxuriating on the sands.

Winters are short (but often rainy), though thrill-seeking skiers will find great off-piste adventures in the Lefka Ori (White Mountains).

Best Places to Eat

- » Portes (p47)
- » Kyra (p64)
- » Kouzina E.P.E. (p47)
- » Papadakis (p69)
- » Platanos (p58)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Doma (p178)
- » Milia (p64)
- » Casa Delfino (p178)
- » Stavroula Palace (p183)

Getting Around

Hania town is easily navigable on foot, and getting around the wider area is easy too. Air-conditioned KTEL buses depart Hania regularly for other towns and villages in the region, plus the major beaches, and towns elsewhere in Crete. As prices have crept up, however, buses are only economical for solo travellers – for several people planning on doing lots of local travel, hiring a car makes more sense (you can pick it up and drop it off wherever you decide, too).

THREE PERFECT DAYS

Day One

Rise early to beat the crowds and contemplate Hania's **Venetian harbour** with a coffee, then visit the fascinating **Byzantine & Post-Byzantine Collection of Hania** and the **Naval Museum** by the Venetian **Firkas Fortress** before enjoying a quick *mayirefta* (ready-cooked) lunch in the spiffy Splantzia quarter. Then take a drive past olive groves to the superlative beach of **Falasarna**, on the western edge of the island. You'll be back in time for dinner at one of Hania's posh outdoor eateries, with wine and grilled octopus under the stars.

Day Two

Burn off the pounds gained from excessive Cretan cookery with a full-day march through **Samaria Gorge**. The early-morning drive (or bus) leads to **Omalos**, where Europe's grandest canyon sprawls southward. Along the way, look out for the elusive *kri-kri* (Crete's shy wild goat) up in the cliffs, and watch the birds of prey circle in the hope of nibbling on a heatstruck hiker. After wriggling through the Iron Gates (Sidiroportes), the gorge's narrowest point, you'll find salvation at **Agia Roumeli**, where the boat goes to **Hora Sfakion** for the bus back to Hania.

Day Three

From the offbeat southwestern beach town of **Paleohora**, a morning boat trip to **Elafonisi** leaves you a full day to savour the splendid sands of variegated tones, and the Libyan Sea's lapping warm waters. The afternoon boat has you back in plenty of time for a hearty dinner of roast lamb and wild greens, before indulging in Paleohora's fun nightlife (often, live Cretan music played on the bouzouki and *lyra*, a kind of violin).

DON'T MISS

Azogires, north of Paleohora, is a memorable village with a deep gorge, good-humoured locals, caverns once inhabited by ascetics, and wooded waterfalls said to be haunted by wickedly flirtatious Nereids.

Best Beaches

- » Elafonisi (p73) – sublime southwestern beach famed for its pink sands
- » Balos (p70) – stunningly clear lagoon of translucent blues and greens, on the Gramvousa Peninsula
- » Falasarna (p71) – the most fun waves in the west slam into this long, sandy beach

Best Gorges

- » Samaria Gorge (p53) – the biggest and most popular
- » Trypiti Gorge (p56) – less visited, but tougher
- » Imbros Gorge (p55) – a thickly forested, shorter cousin of Samaria

Resources

- » www.chania.gr
- » www.eoshanion.gr
- » www.west-crete.com

Accommodation

For sleeping options throughout this region, please see the Accommodation chapter (p175).