

# welcome to Crete



## Bewitching Scenery

Crete is in many respects the culmination of the Greek experience. Nature here has been as prolific as Picasso in his prime. There's something undeniably artistic in the way the landscape unfolds, from the sun-drenched beaches in the north to rugged canyons spilling into a cove-riddled and cliff-studded south coast. In between, valleys cradle moody villages, and round-shouldered hills are the overture to often snow-dabbed mountains. Take it all in on a driving tour or venture outdoors and trek through Europe's longest gorge, hike to the cave where Zeus was born, cycle among orchards on the Lasithi Plateau or simply plant your footprints on a sandy beach.

## Rich Historical Tapestry

Crete's natural beauty is equalled only by the richness of its history. The island is the birthplace of the first advanced society on European soil, the Minoans, who ruled over much of the Aegean some 4000 years ago. You'll find vestiges of this mysterious civilisation all over, including the famous Palace of Knossos. At the crossroads of three continents, Crete has been coveted and occupied by consecutive invaders. History imbues the air in the old towns of Hania and Rethymno, where labyrinthine lanes – laid out by the Venetians – are lorded over by mighty fortresses, and where gorgeously restored Renaissance mansions rub rafters with mosques and Turkish bathhouses.

GARETH MCCORMACK/LOVELY PLANET IMAGES



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

(left) Parasols and sunbathers at Marble Beach  
(below) Mural at the Palace of Knossos

MARIA BREUER/IMAGEBROKER



Hundreds of chapels, churches and monasteries – often with Byzantine roots – attest to the influence of the Orthodox Church. Many still sport magnificent frescoes, especially the Church of Panagia Kera in Lasithi, while others, such as Moni Arkadiou near Rethymno, played key historic roles during the Ottoman era and WWII.

## Culture, Cuisine & Character

In the end, though, it's humans – not bricks and mortar – that create the most vivid memories. Crete's spirited people champion their unique culture and customs, and time-honoured traditions remain a dynamic part of the island's soul. Meeting

regular folk gossiping in *kafeneia* (coffee houses), preparing their Easter feast, tending to their sheep or celebrating during their many festivals is what makes a visit to Crete so special. And if you're a traveller on the gourmet trail, you'll delight in the distinctive farm-fresh and organic cuisine served in tavernas across the island. In fact, the Cretan diet is among the healthiest in the world. Be sure to pair your meal with an excellent local wine and, to cap it off, a fiery shot of *raki*.