



Rethymno Ρέθυμνο

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Best Places to Eat

- » Avli (p83)
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- » O Kipos Tis Arkoudenas (p89)
- » Panorama (p102)
- » Taverna Kastro (p101)

Best Places to Stay

- » Enagron (p187)
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- » Kavos Melissa (p189)
- » Kapsaliana Village (p187)
- » Hotel Veneto (p185)

Why Go?

Rethymno is a fascinating quilt of bubbly resorts, centuries-old villages and energising towns. There's astounding geographical diversity just minutes from the hustle and bustle of the region's eponymous capital on the north coast: you'll quickly find yourself immersed in endless tranquillity and natural beauty as you drift through tiny hamlets cradled by olive groves where locals cherish traditions that have stood the test of time. Descend into the spooky darkness of grotto-like caves or explore the island's 'upper storey' atop lofty Mt Psiloritis, Crete's highest peak. The south coast is a different animal altogether – a wild beauty with steep gorges and bewitching beaches in seductive isolation. Be it soaking up the rays on a sandy beach, hot-rodding it around the countryside or sipping a cocktail at a waterfront cafe-bar, just weave your way through this spellbinding land and be prepared for the unexpected at any given turn.

When to Go

During February/March, party with the locals as they let their hair down at dances, games, masquerade balls, parades and other raucous shenanigans during Rethymno's Carnival, Greece's biggest pre-Lent celebrations.

As days get longer in April, anemones, orchids, lupins and tulips are among the many springtime wildflowers that push up from rain-drenched soil and bathe hillsides, olive groves, stony fields and roadsides in an intense glow.

September and October are great for visiting southern beaches: the big crowds are gone, the sea is at its balmiest and the wicked winds have died down.

DON'T MISS

Tucking into fresh trout, grilled over a wood fire, surrounded by rushing natural mountain springs and clear, crisp air is among the delights of **Argyroupoli**, one of Rethymno's dreamiest mountain villages.

Best Beaches

- » Preveli Beach (p98) – famous palm grove at the mouth of a gorge
- » Triopetra (p98) – long, sandy and remote
- » Agios Pavlos (p98) – isolated, cliff-fringed cove
- » Karavostasi, Bali (p101) – gorgeous, kid-friendly, sandy crescent

Best Historical Sites

- » Moni Arkadiou (p89) – ultimate symbol of Cretan resistance
- » Rethymno fortress (p80) – massive Venetian fortifications
- » Moni Preveli (p97) – famous for its key role in WWII
- » Melidoni Cave (p91) – site of a terrible massacre
- » Ancient Eleftherna (p90) – active archaeological site with a Dorian, Roman and Hellenistic past

Resources

- » www.rethymnon.gr
- » www.rethymnoatcrete.com

Getting Around

The roads in Rethymno are generally good. The E75 highway connects Rethymno with Iraklio and Hania, while coastal communities are accessed via the parallel Old National Rd. South-coast driving, meanwhile, means negotiating a maddening warren of tiny roads off the Rethymno–Agia Galini road. The going is scenic but slow here and also in other rural areas, such as the Amari Valley and the foothills of Mt Psiloritis. From about April to October, buses link Rethymno with major towns and tourist attractions on a regular basis.

THREE PERFECT DAYS

Day One

Spend the morning exploring Rethymno's **Venetian fortress** and labyrinth-like historic quarter. Then, after lunch at **Avli**, steer your car to **Marianna's** in Maroulas to stock up on her unique herbal products. Next, find out why **Moni Arkadiou** occupies such a special place in Cretan souls before poking around the ruins of **Ancient Eleftherna**. Carry on to **Margarites** to browse for handmade pottery and sip a late-afternoon cocktail on a scenic taverna terrace. For an authentic Cretan feast, make dinner reservations at **Agreco Farm**.

Day Two

Get an early start in **Plakias** and beat the crowds to **Preveli Beach**. When the hordes arrive, head back uphill for a dose of Cretan history at **Moni Preveli**. Say goodbye to civilisation and get lost in the maze of winding coastal roads leading to the fabulously secluded beaches of **Ligres**, **Triopetra** and **Agios Pavlos**. When you're done splashing, drive back for a true Cretan country dinner with Maria at **Iliomanolis** in Kanevos.

Day Three

From Panormo or Bali, take the short drive to moody **Melidoni Cave**, site of a horrendous massacre under Turkish rule; then compare it with the more classic beauty of Zoniana's **Sfendoni Cave**. Stop in Axos for an organic Cretan lunch at **Enagron**, then continue to **Anogia** to browse for textiles and check out a couple of quirky museums. All day long, majestic **Mt Psiloritis** has stood sentinel above you and now you're getting a close-up look on a drive up to the **Nida Plateau**. Take the short walk to **Ideon Cave** before heading back to sea level.

Accommodation

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