



Understand Crete

CRETE TODAY202

Greece has been hard hit by the recession and excessive debt. How has Crete fared through it all?

HISTORY204

We show you how Minoans, Romans, Venetians, Ottomans and today's travellers have shaped the cradle of European civilisation.

THE CRETAN PEOPLE220

Fierce, proud, independent, with a love of age-old traditions and customs, Cretans will charm, impress and surprise you.

MINOAN ART & CULTURE226

Excavated paintings, jewellery, sculptures and pottery provide a priceless insight into the Minoan world and demonstrate the society's extraordinary artistry.

MUSIC & DANCE230

From rhyming couplets to rebel songs, we introduce you to Cretan music and dance, and the instruments, styles and people who are associated with them.

FINE ARTS, LITERATURE & FILM233

From seminal artists to Nobel Prize laureates and Academy Award winners, this little island has produced them all.

CRETAN CUISINE238

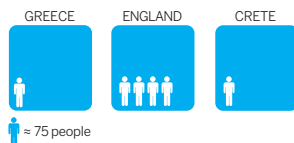
The Cretan diet is considered one of the healthiest in the world. Read our delicious guide and find out why.

WILDLIFE & BIRDWATCHING247

Crete brims with furry, feathered and flippers creatures, many of them endemic, some of them sadly endangered.



population per sq km



Crete Today

Crete & the Fiscal Crisis

As with anywhere in Greece, Crete has certainly not been immune to the country's severe debt crisis. In April 2010, the euro-zone countries approved a €100 billion package of emergency loans to prevent the country from defaulting on its €327 billion debt (equal to 150% of its GDP). The bailout deal required the Athens government to impose strict austerity measures (public spending cuts, pension reform and across-the-board tax increases) as well as to raise €50 billion through the privatisation of state-controlled companies. However, in spring 2011 it became clear that even these measures would not go far enough. In July 2011, euro-zone leaders approved a second aid package amounting to an additional €109 billion to help Greece get its economy back on track.

Tourism on the Rebound

While the government's austerity measures were hardly popular in Crete, they did not trigger the kind of strikes and violent protests seen in Athens. Indeed, there may be reasons for quiet optimism. In 2011, after a couple of meagre years, locals breathed a collective sigh of relief when tourism was up by 15%. As a key engine of the Cretan economy, tourism generates some 40% of its output and accounts for at least one in five jobs. Though welcome, the uptick did not mean that Crete was out of the woods, especially since visitors were largely lured by lower or stagnant prices.

Meanwhile, Crete is also increasingly tapping into the potential of sustainable eco-travel. EU grants to promote green tourism and preserve cultural heritage have resulted in the restoration of historic buildings and a proliferation of traditional guesthouses, villas and apartments, especially in rural areas.

- » Population: 630,000
- » Area: 8336 sq km
- » GDP: €9.167 billion
- » GDP per capita: €23,500
- » Number of visitors: 2.8 million
- » Number of olive trees: 30 million

Faux Pas

- » Don't dress immodestly when visiting a church or monastery. Keep your arms and legs covered.
- » Although it's widely practised, don't assume you can go topless or au naturel on beaches.
- » Don't call on anyone at home during the post-lunch *mesimeri* (siesta, 3pm to 5pm).
- » Cretans take their hospitality seriously, so if you are treated to a drink or meal, accept graciously – rejection can cause offence.

Top Films

- Zorba the Greek** (1964) Boasting three Academy Awards, this is still the quintessential Crete-filmed movie.
- Night Ambush** (1957) Gripping retelling of the kidnapping of Nazi General Heinrich Kreipe by British forces in 1944.