



# Crete



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

**Alexis Averbuck,**  
**Kate Armstrong, Korina Miller, Richard Waters**

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VENETIAN HARBOUR,  
RETHYMNO P107



DAKOS P43

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## Plan Your Trip

# Itineraries



**2**  
WEEKS

### Essential Crete

Bookended by two of Crete's great cities, this route is a roller-coaster ride through the natural wonders of mountain and sea, and several of Crete's most famous historical treasures. You'll also get to soak up Venetian architecture, and feast on both mountain-village and seafront cuisine.

Start in bustling **Iraklio**, checking out the superb museums and soaking up its cafe culture, before heading to the **Palace of Knossos** where the mysterious Minoans ruled about 4000 years ago. Spend a day

enjoying the fruits of the **Iraklio Wine Country**, where 70% of Crete's wine is produced, and which is dotted with wineries. Next, stake out a base near Matala to combine trips to **Gortyna**, the former capital of Roman Crete, as well as the grand Minoan palaces of **Phaestos** and **Agia Triada**. The outstanding Cretan cultural museum at **Vori** and swimming at wide, sandy **Kommos** and **Kalamaki** beaches round out the area's offerings.

Travelling west, lunch in the quaint village of **Spili**, home to several excellent tavernas creating traditional Cretan cuisine. Then drive (or hike the Kourtaliotiko



Venetian lighthouse (p56), Hania

Gorge) to **Moni Preveli**, a working monastery on a hill with sweeping views of the Libyan Sea, and picture-postcard **Preveli Beach** down below. Start week two by heading north to soulful **Rethymno**, where you can spend two days wandering the maze of Venetian lanes and another exploring the countryside, perhaps steering towards the pottery village of **Margarites**, the peaceful **Moni Arkadiou**, site of momentous historical events, or the cool natural spring oasis at the mountain village of **Argyroupoli**.

For a taste of the west stay in **Hania**, a lively modern city wrapped around

a romantic Venetian harbour and atmosphere-laden pedestrianised quarters. When you've had your fill of this historic beauty, take the early bus to **Samaria Gorge** and trek one of Europe's most famous canyons to the beachfront terminus at the small hamlet of **Agia Roumeli**. Stay over or catch a boat to **Loutro**, to spend the night in this quaint harbour accessible only on foot or by boat.

Next morning, take the boat to **Hora Sfakion** where you can have a seafood lunch and the local cheese-stuffed-crêpe speciality, and then loop back to Hania.





10  
DAYS

## Central to West Crete

This trip presents you with the mother lode of soul-stirring attractions, including the unspoiled southern coast, higgledy-piggledy mountain villages, Crete's best beaches, and spirit-lifting culture in Crete's two most attractive towns, Rethymno and Hania.

Kick off your trip in **Iraklio**, taking in the Archaeological Museum and imposing fortress, and swinging out to the **Palace of Knossos**, before steering west to quaint **Anogia**, where ancient traditions and Cretan music thrive at the foot of Mt Psiloritis. Continue west via the pottery village of Margarites to **Moni Arkadiou**, the site of one of the bloodiest moments in Crete's struggle for independence from the Turks. Spend the next day in stately **Rethymno**, taking your sweet time ambling around its bewitching mix of Turkish and Venetian buildings.

From Rethymno push on to the southern coast, where the lively beach town of **Plakias** makes an ideal base for exploring nearby secluded beaches, including palm-studded **Prevveli Beach**, stunningly located at the mouth of a rugged gorge. Heading west, make a pit stop at the seaside fortress of **Frangokastello** before zipping over to **Hora Sfakion**, where you can hop on a boat to explore the remote villages along this beautiful stretch of coast for a day (or two!). Continue north from Hora Sfakion towards the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) and make time for a hike through spectacular **Imbros Gorge**. Continue to the northern coast and linger a night or two in **Hania**, with its beautiful harbour, grand fortress and ambience-packed old town.

From here you can explore the far western reaches of Crete. Take the circular route southwest via Kolymbari and the Innahorion villages to the westernmost tip of the island at **Elafonisi**, which beckons with pink-shimmering sandy beaches. Pushing back north via the coastal road, continue the beach theme at broad **Falasarna** with its rolling waves, or detour to the Gramvousa Peninsula's spectacular lagoon-like beach at **Balos**, which you'll most likely access by day-boat from **Kissamos**.

Returning back to Iraklio via Hania, consider making a quick detour to the springs of **Argyroupoli** before taking the coastal road east of Rethymno via peaceful Panormo and busy Bali.



GARETH MCCORMACK / GETTY IMAGES ©



GEORGE PAPAPOSTOLOU PHOTOGRAPHER / GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Plakias (p127)  
Bottom: Balos beach (p99)



## Around Iraklio

Iraklio is a big, busy city, but it can be a useful base from which to access many of Crete's most famous sights, even without your own vehicle. Or if you have wheels and your budget allows, stay in Arhanes in the nearby Iraklio Wine Country, to make these looping day trips.

Crete's largest city, **Iraklio** offers top-notch museums, a Venetian fortress, a colourful street market, lively nightlife and excellent dining. While there, make sure you visit the beautifully renovated and curated Heraklion Archaeological Museum so that you'll be prepared for Crete's grandest Minoan palace. Drive or hop on a bus for the quick ride to the world-famous **Palace of Knossos** for a full-scale introduction to Minoan society, partially reconstructed.

On another day, apply what you've learned on a visit to the **Palace of Malia**, another Minoan site, and some people's favourite, with sweeping sea views. You can then explore small mountain villages by zigzagging through tiny Krasí to **Kerá**, which is home to the revered Panagia Kardiotissa monastery, with its 14th-century frescoes and holy icon. Nearby Sfendile was controversially inundated by the creation of a dam.

If you have your own wheels, designate a driver and spend a day sampling the local vintages of the **Iraklio Wine Country**, which is dotted with wineries and tasting rooms. Plan to stop at the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum in **Myrtia** and the moody Minoan vestiges in **Arhanes**, which also has great traditional tavernas – perfect for a lunch break. Or sample the tippie around Dafnes, the other main hub of the wine country.

Take a scenic drive to the rustic mountain village of **Zaros**, at the foot of Mt Psiloritis. Leave time to hike nearby trails, explore Byzantine churches and dine on fresh trout. If you're thirsty for a beach day instead of a hike, continue a bit further along to beautiful sands at Kommos or **Kalamaki Beach**. And if you have time to sleep over, the next day you can explore quaint villages Sivas and **Kamilari**, Minoan ruins at **Phaestos**, and Roman ones at **Gortyna**, before looping north again.

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ED FREEMAN / GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Palace of Malia (p185)  
Bottom: Palace of Knossos (p157)







1  
WEEK

## Eastern Crete

There's a world of discoveries awaiting in eastern Crete, from the inviting town of Agios Nikolaos to some of the island's most beautiful churches and moodily historic sights. Arm yourself with some curiosity and a good map, and the week will fly by with no two days spent the same way.

Make your base at charming **Agios Nikolaos**, arrayed beautifully along both the sea and an interior lake. You'll have to tear yourself away from its bustling cafes and delicious waterfront eateries in order to take in the gorgeous mountain scenery on the **Lasithi Plateau**, high on the upper decks of the Dikti Mountains, where wind power once drove the sails of thousands of windmills. Plan a day of walks or cycling, and visit Zeus' birthplace in the Dikteon Cave, to earn your meal when you return to the coast.

It's easy to lose yourself along the winding roads north of **Myrtos**, where bare mountains crowned with coxcombs of rock rise from green woods. You can also easily lose a few days along the coast here, soaking up bohemian beach living.

If you're keen on history, plan a day wandering among the fascinating ruins on **Spinalonga Island**, made famous recently by Victoria Hislop's novel, *The Island*. Or, visit **Milatos Cave**, the site of an 1823 massacre of villagers by Turkish besiegers, which today is a serene and absorbing corner of rural Crete.

To satisfy artistic cravings, steer yourself to the Church of Panagia Kera near **Kritsa** for a feast of fabulous 13th-century frescoes, the finest in Crete. Archaeology fans can indulge their passion at the Late Minoan site of **Gournia**, where a full Minoan town is overlooked by a once-great palace.

Outdoors lovers should not miss the walk along the tail-end of the E4 European Path, down the Valley of the Dead, where the awesome landscape overwhelms the human element. You'll pass Minoan cave burials and reach the eastern coast at the ruined Minoan palace of **Kato Zakros (Valley of the Dead)**.



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Top: Church of Panagia Kera (p198)

Bottom: Traditional windmills, Lasithi Plateau (p202)



# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/S-train/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Alexis Averback

**Coordinating Author;** **Hania** Alexis lives in Hydra, Greece, and makes any excuse she can to travel the isolated back roads of her adopted land. While she is committed to dispelling the stereotype that Greece is simply a string of sandy beaches, she admits that Crete's pink sands blow her mind. A lover of local cuisine, Alexis enjoys sampling the amazing food of Crete, and exploring villages in search of delectable treats. She was overjoyed to cover Hania again; it's one

of her favourite cities in Greece. Alexis also wrote the Plan Your Trip section (excluding Outdoor Activities and Travel with Children), Best of Crete, Crete Today, History, The Cretan Way of Life, The Arts, and the Survival Guide section. A travel writer for two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat and written books on her journeys through Asia and the Americas. She's also a painter – visit [www.alexisaverback.com](http://www.alexisaverback.com).



### Kate Armstrong

**Iraklio** Aeons ago, Kate visited Crete to hike the Samaria Gorge and visit Knossos full of post-Fine Arts 101 knowledge. Years later she returned for Lonely Planet to the land of *filoxenia*. In Iraklio, she gorged herself on sheep's-milk yoghurt and honey, manoeuvred her hire car down precipitous winding roads, hiked through magnificent gorges and chatted with the delightful souls of this special island. Not to mention discovered magic in the island's incredible 'piles of rock'. Follow

her adventures at [www.katearmstrongtravelwriter.com](http://www.katearmstrongtravelwriter.com) and @nomaditis.



### Korina Miller

**Rethymno** Korina first ventured to Greece as a backpacking teenager, sleeping on ferry decks and hiking in the mountains. Since then, she's found herself drawn back to soak up the timelessness of the old towns and drink coffee with locals in seaside *kafeneia*. Korina grew up on Vancouver Island and has been exploring the globe independently since she was 16, visiting or living in 36 countries and picking up a degree in Communications and Canadian Studies and an MA in Migration Studies en

route. Korina has written nearly 40 titles for Lonely Planet and also works as a children's writing coach.



### Richard Waters

**Lasithi** Richard is an award-winning journalist who writes about Greece for the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent* and *Sunday Times Travel Magazine*. He lives with his family in the Cotswolds but his spiritual home is the islands of Greece, where he first went as a boy in 1974. Since then he has been over 20 times, and is most at home sitting in a *kafeneio* talking about myths, digging into freshly caught calamari, and island hopping. As ever his admiration goes out to the people of Greece, who

despite unimaginably difficult times remain among the friendliest on the planet. Richard also wrote the Outdoor Activities, Travel with Children, Minoan Art & Culture and Nature & Wildlife chapters.

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